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Lilith

vol. 39, no. 2 • summer 2014

*In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said, "We are equal; we come from the same earth."**

14
A Feminist Camp Counselor Unpacks Her Baggage
by Maya Zinkow
Is camp a place for exploration—or indoctrination? Maya Zinkow speaks out on sex, ritual and gender identity in Jewish summer camp.

16
Lot's Wife
A biblical revisioning by Michal Lemberger

19
The Art of Ornament: Israeli Women Jewelers
A review by Laura Kruger
From Yemenite wedding ornaments to daring modernist designs, Israel's creators of wearable art cross cultural divides. How did they become such boundary breakers?

22
The Explosion
by Natasha Basin-Levina, translated by Sonia Melnikova-Raich
The writer witnesses terrorism from her kitchen and can't make sense of why her face is front-page news.

26
Reading Under the Covers
by Esther Amini
What happens when her Persian father won't let her go to college.

CHANGE BECKONS

31
Hear, O Israel: How a Christian Boyfriend Got Me to Synagogue
by Deborah L. Blicher
In the flickering embers of her romance with an Episcopalian graduate student, Blicher finds Jewish praxis catching fire. How come?

34
Hineni: Here I Am: Continuity After Conversion
a spiritual recollection by Gail Hosking

36
A Woman's Tashlich: Walking Along the Water's Edge
with Marcia Falk and Rabbi Susan Schnur
Guided by the poems of Leah Goldberg, Malka Heifetz Tussman, and Zelda, liturgist Marcia Falk and Rabbi Susan Schnur create a new vision of spiritual turning that focuses on water...and women in conversation.

*Alphabet of Ben Sira, 23a-b

3
From the Editor
Susan Weidman Schneider on the processes of making change.

4
Voices
Leading the klezmer band • Israeli women soldiers rebel • Feminist Jews at Barnard • What is being taught when girls are instructed in "modesty"? • and more

10
Recounting
a short story by Courtney Sender

13
The Shabbat Before Her Wedding
a poem by Jamie Wendt

40
Reviews
Orly Castel-Blum's new novel • Poetry collections from Maxine Kumin, Alicia Ostriker, Robin Becker and Ellen Bass • Liana Finck

And Short the Season
Panic in a Suitcase
ANYA ULINICH
LENA FINKLE'S MAGIC BARREL
Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?

on cartoonist Roz Chast's unfunny stories about her parents • Sonia Isard decodes Russian novels • and more

46
Happening
compiled by Naomi Danis
Your resource guide.

48
Cut Loose
by Leah Vincent
In which a seventeen-year-old struggles to live solo in New York, sent away by her ultra-Orthodox family.

COVER ART: "OFFSPRING" BY MARY FRANK
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST, DC MOORE GALLERY, NEW YORK, AND ELENA ZANG GALLERY, WOODSTOCK, NEW YORK

"Money is the bio-fuel that sustains transformative change."
—Nessa Rapoport

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ILLUSTRATION: NICOLE HOLLANDER

Gloria Steinem, who just celebrated her 80th birthday, wrote to congratulate Lilith a few years ago on one of our own landmark anniversaries. She praised the magazine for doing its groundbreaking work "with anger and delight."

"Lilith creates a voice where there was silence; it saves what is good within the patriarchy while transforming what is destructive; it offers scholarship for argument and women's personal voices for enlightenment; and it does all of this with anger and delight, good writing and humor," she wrote.

At the time, I was charmed by the fact that anger was on Gloria Steinem's approval list, and charmed also that in Lilith it was paired with wit. Somehow that took the curse off anger. I've always held fast to the idea that the ways in which we work for change matter. And I've never believed anger works as a teaching tool. As reviewers have pointed out, the light tone of the new romantic comedy "Obvious Child," with its straightforward portrayal of an unmarried woman's uncomplicated abortion can do more for abortion rights than outraged op-eds. Could be.

But now, in the wake of recent news out of the U.S. Supreme Court, I'm ready for just plain anger. The righteous kind. And we don't even have to dress it in wit.

It's not often that an issue arises where you can feel equal outrage as a woman and as a Jew. June's U.S. Supreme Court decision that some corporations have the right to deny employees contraceptive coverage under their health insurance plans means that one religious group—Christians who believe that contraception methods equal abortion—has the right to foist its beliefs on the bodies—on the health—of a whole nation of women. It's *enraging*.

Here is the scathing dissent written by Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg:

"Would the exemption…extend to employers with religiously grounded objections to blood transfusions (Jehovah's Witnesses); antidepressants (Scientologists); medications derived from pigs, including anesthesia, intravenous fluids, and pills coated with gelatin (certain Muslims, Jews, and Hindus); and vaccinations[?]…Not much help there for the lower courts bound by today's decision."

Our collective response to this decision to have corporations control women's bodies has got to be anger, staying true to our own feelings and not masking them.

As I look through Lilith's archives at our coverage of abortion rights, contraception, and laws affecting our bodies (and hence our minds) I notice a change of tone through the years. First it was diagnostic and hortatory: Here's what's wrong, and here's how you should fix it. Righteous anger was a staple, and writers hoped it would help move the needle, help push for positive change and more rights for women.

Then, anger began to be replaced by nuance. In almost every Lilith article or blog post now, we as editors encourage writers and thinkers to probe how deeply they can go in exploring all sides of a story. We want readers to understand motivation, to ask the many what-ifs. In fact, we pride ourselves on nuance.

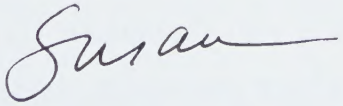
But in the case of the recent news, why delve into the motives of the justices who decided that it was OK to deny an entire class of people—women—the insurance coverage for drugs or devices they need? The five male justices seem to have accepted as truth the misunderstanding of the plaintiff, the Hobby Lobby crafts corporation. They were looking to limit contraception access based on a religious belief that abortion is wrong, and that the medicines and devices used for contraception actually cause abortions—a misunderstanding of how contraceptive drugs and IUDs work in the first place. (Disappointingly, some right-wing Jewish religious organizations filed an *amicus* brief in favor of denying coverage.)

Is our anger overtaken by our need for nuance?

Lilith has written from time to time about the schism between Christian and Jewish dogma on matters of reproduction. But I can't think of a case where that difference is highlighted quite so starkly. The damage to women is obvious. The damage to Jews includes the setting of a bad precedent—that the religious beliefs of one set of Americans has the power to affect the way others practice their religion.

Women living—and voting—in the United States are horrified, are at risk, and are angry at the decision made by five men. It's a decision that will likely bring bad news and bad consequences to women, who now have fewer rights than corporations do. The horror—and the accompanying anger—are justified.

At one of the gatherings marking Gloria Steinem's birthday, Letty Cottin Pogrebin remarked that "Well-behaved women won't change the world." I don't expect that by getting mad we'll get even—whatever that would mean in a world where men do not need contraceptives. But we can get results. Especially at the polls, and especially in our local communities. When women's needs are denied en masse, righteous anger can be a tool to shape election outcomes and the court cases to come.



Susan Weidman Schneider
Editor in Chief

PHOTO: DAVID GREENSPUN

"It's not that kids need to somehow be shielded from images of women's breasts and abs. Rather, it's that these costumes convey a message to children about what powerful women look like. If a girl wants to grow up to be as strong as Wonder Woman, as powerful as Psylocke, as skilled as Elektra, does she have to put her body on display for the pleasure of other people, too?"

Pop culture writer and io9 editor **Lauren Davis** on why the differences between male and female superhero costumes matter. *io9.com*, May 5, 2014

#YESALLWOMEN

Elliot Rodger, the deeply misogynistic UC Santa Barbara shooter who killed 7 in May, blamed his rage on the women who'd rejected him. With the aid of the Twitter hashtag #YesAllWomen, the Internet swelled with accounts of women's chronic fear of male violence.

Rachel Sklar, media critic, posted about her own experience of partner violence: "...I was lucky. I got out quickly. I wasn't hurt. I moved on. There are plenty of other women who have suffered much worse.

"But that's exactly what #YesAllWomen is about. Not having to fear for our safety should not be considered 'luck'."

Medium.com, May 28, 2014.

VOICES ILLUSTRATION BY LIANA FINCK

WOMEN ON THE RISE

Female in the Lead

For **Annette Ezekiel Kogan**, founder, vocalist and accordionist of the punk klezmer band Golem, being the female bandleader of an all-male band is a complicated balancing act. "I feel like I go in between worlds—I'm the sexy singer, and then I'm conducting, running the show. I'm the band mother to all the guys."

Kogan came to klezmer in a roundabout fashion. Inspired by her grandfather, who had immigrated to America from Ukraine, she began studying Russian as a Columbia undergraduate. After teaching herself the accordion, she picked up and sang Russian and Ukrainian folk songs, to the delight of fellow students. Then, while studying Proust in a PhD program, she got interested in Yiddish and realized that she wanted to play klezmer, declaring, "*Jewish* music is mine."

So she decided to found her own band, Golem (named for the legendary creature of clay created by **Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel** in sixteenth-century Prague). Golem played its first gig in November 2000. Over the course of 14 years and six albums, the ensemble's music has evolved significantly.

"When I started Golem, I had no interest in original songs. I said, I'm interested in preserving the Old World through those old songs—my grandfather's world," Kogan said, in a recent conversation at the Lilith office. Then the band's music began to express juxtapositions between contemporary American-Jewish experiences and the "Old Country" of Eastern Europe. The new direction was partially inspired by the immigrant experience of Kogan's husband, **Sasha**, who emigrated from Eastern Ukraine in 1992. Just as Kogan's grandfather had spoken of pogroms in Dniepropetrovsk, Sasha's family fled Kharkov and claimed refugee status in the United States because of their own experience of anti-Semitism in that city.

"A lot of our original songs are based on my husband's family stories—folk songs for a new experience that's the same as the old experience," Kogan said. The song "Mirror Mirror," off 2009's "Citizen Boris," exemplifies this blend of old and new: she based the song on both her great-grandmother's and her mother-in-law's experiences of immigrating from Eastern Europe. The song lyrically melds multiple generations of female longing.

"Tanz," Golem's new album, combines traditional klezmer motifs with rock and punk, and makes heavy use of Russian in its lyrics, along with Yiddish and English. Singing in a Slavic language in addition to Yiddish, the band hopes to subvert the idea that the shtetl and its culture were purely monolingual.

"I think of Golem as using all the languages in the shtetl," Kogan said. "There was no shtetl in which it was exclusively a Yiddish world. There was Yiddish and Ukrainian, or Russian, or Polish, there were Gypsies coming through—it was a very mixed world."

A striking change in Golem's attitudes over time is the band's increasing incorporation of Jewish religious tradition into their music and performance. Their new song "Mikveh Bath" focuses on the quintessentially female ritual of immersing in a mikveh to purify oneself prior to marriage, and thereafter monthly prior to resuming sex. The slow, sensual song is told from the point of view of a young girl in the shtetl, immersing herself before meeting her bridegroom for the first time.

"The mikveh bath will purify me/before I lie down in my wedding bed./Will he close his eyes before we kiss? Will he run his fingers through my hair?/Will he undress in the other room/Or watch me as I say the evening prayer?"

With the tentative eroticism of its lyrics, the song recasts the mikveh ritual as an empowering expression of female sexuality. At the same time, as a female musical performer, Kogan has also had to adapt to very traditional religious environments. When the group is hired for private events, for example, clients occasionally request that she refrain from singing, following the constraints of *kol isha*, an Orthodox prohibition on women singing in public. However, for public performances, the band's policy is to reject bookings at which Annette would be barred from singing.

"The band—they get angry on my behalf more often than I do," she says, laughing. "I'm a female leader, for sure, in all ways."

TALIA LAVIN

"My family history sensitized me to what it feels like to be deprived of a past as well as to how, in the absence of records, we turn to people as the living repository of history."

Gail Reimer, founder of the broadly influential Jewish Women's Archive, spoke to a crowd in Manhattan at a May event marking her retirement after 18 years as the organization's executive director. She will be succeeded by historian **Judith Rosenbaum**. Reimer talked about her motivations, as the child of Holocaust survivors, for founding the JWA.

PHOTO COURTESY ANNETTE EZEKIEL KOGAN

FILM

Much More Than an Israeli "Private Benjamin"

"Zero Motivation" is a new and delightfully poignant Israeli film that zings myths of women's equal participation in the Israeli army, with frank humor and staple guns to battle the military's bureaucracy and sexism.

Inspired by her own experiences with other women relegated to boring assignments in administrative offices for their mandatory two-year army service, writer/director **Talya Lavie**'s debut premiered at the 2014 Tribeca Film Festival in New York City, where it garnered two awards. "We believe a new, powerful, voice has emerged," crowed the jury for the competitive Best Narrative Feature award. The jury for the second annual Nora Ephron Prize for a female director or screenwriter, which included Delia Ephron, offered similar acclaim, stating that "Zero Motivation" was "definitely the most hilarious film we saw at the festival...the winning film is a fresh, original, and heartfelt comedy." But this isn't just an Israeli version of "Private Benjamin"; this film is far more darkly pointed and complex.

The film follows one year in the life of soldier-secretaries in the human resources office at a desert base in the south of Israel in 2004, a year marked by rapid changes in technology and gender relations. The narrative unfolds in three chapters. The first expands on Lavie's 2005 20-minute film-school thesis, "The Substitute" (available online with an English transcript), focusing on the naïve schemes of Daffi (**Nelly Tagar**), who hails from a northern town, to find a replacement so she can transfer to Tel Aviv. Part 2, "The Virgin," focuses on Daffi's best friend, Zohar (**Dana Ivgy**, a renowned young film star), for whom "anything is better than the kibbutz"—even a forlorn desert outpost. As the titular virgin, Zohar is enticed by the unfamiliar presence of men she wasn't raised with, and begins to take sexual risks. When she is briefly liberated from paperwork, her first assignment on guard duty becomes a vengefully comedic moment that involves humiliating male nudity at the point of a gun. By Part 3 Daffi has become "The Officer," to the frustration of their ambitious, perpetually thwarted supervisor Rama (**Shani Klein**), who wants to make her pioneer soldier mother proud, despite the rebellious women serving under her and the condescending men over her.

Lavie deftly balances comedy with deadly serious issues. She sensitively portrays an array of women from diverse social strata, including an immigrant from Russia and one from Ethiopia. Focusing the lens tightly on young female soldiers, she reveals the ways in which these women are at once fully developed adults and game-playing teenagers. Mean girl cliques, eating disorders, text-messaging miscommunications, boyfriend troubles and suicide loom larger than any external enemy. Opening first in Israel, Canada, and Australia, Zeitgeist Films will put this must-see for Jewish feminists in theaters across the U.S. later this year. Don't miss it.

NORA LEE MANDEL

PHOTO: IMDB.COM

"Telling women to meditate, 'be grateful', sit up straight and get good sleep (some of the book's confidence 'quick fixes') might make us feel better—but it won't make the world better. You can't self-help away deeply ingrained structural discrimination."

Jessica Valenti, founder of the blog Feministing, responding to **Katty Kay** and **Claire Shipman**, two successful female news anchors. Kay and Shipman posited in the Atlantic's April issue that the persistent pay and achievement gap between women and men comes down to confidence: women are more insecure than their male counterparts, and therefore less likely to push for success. From *theguardian.com*, April 23, 2014.

EDUCATION

Teaching the Laws of Modesty in Jewish Schools

When I think back on my Orthodox high school Jewish education, the majority of what I can remember has to do with the laws of modesty. One year my Jewish law class spent the entire year going through a book called *Hatznea Lechet*, (The Modest Way) a compendium of sources having to do with how women should comport themselves in order to live modest lives. The title of the book comes from the Book of Micah, where the prophet explains what God requires of the people: "only to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly [or modestly] with thy God." Modesty, the book asserts, is one of the three main pillars of Jewish life.

I have no objection to modesty as a concept. On the spectrum between pride and modesty, I certainly aim to fall much closer to modesty. The problem is that modesty as taught, particularly to Jewish girls, is not a concept of mentality and thoughtfulness, it's about physical appearance. In addition to the hundreds of hours I spent studying texts about the evils of wearing pants, the girls at my school were subjected to seemingly endless lectures on the nuances of the school dress code. When a new principal took over in the middle of my freshman year, his first point of order when speaking to students was that he was going to crack down on girls whose skirts did not cover the entirety of their knees. He also decided that the previous rule that all girls' sleeves had to come to at least mid-bicep was not good enough. After he took over sleeves had to go all the way to the elbow.

I rolled my eyes at the time (though, to be honest, I rolled my eyes at everything when I was 14) but I bought into the basic concept of modest dress as it was explained to me: by covering up and deemphasizing the physical I was allowing people to focus on my personality and "true self," and not just my physical appearance. My physical appearance was distracting for men, and by dressing modestly I could ensure that they wouldn't be judging me purely on what I wore or looked like—they would be able to see me for who I really was.

Even if we decide to generously set aside the rape culture that is implicit in this idea—it was my responsibility as a woman, and my rabbis' responsibility as my authorities, to do whatever possible to minimize distractions for men, not any man's responsibility to get ahold of himself of he found himself distracted by my apparently devastatingly sexy biceps—it ends up simply shifting the judgment one notch over. Piety, I learned, could be immediately assessed by looking at someone's outfit. If her knees were visible, if she wore pants, if she didn't cover her hair after marriage or did so only in a certain way—all of these things could tell me volumes about her commitment to God and Torah, not to mention whether she was a good person.

So much of what I learned in high school has, mercifully, faded or washed away completely since then. I like to think of myself as committed to God and Torah, and as a good person, but my life would probably not be recognizable as such to my high school teachers, in that I wear pants and regularly French kiss my spouse in public. One thing that has stuck with me is the habit of judging Jewish women I meet based on what they wear. When I meet a woman in my neighborhood wearing jeans and a t-shirt, I don't assume I know anything at all about her. When I'm introduced to a woman in a skirt that goes to her knees, with a headband that may or may not be a really nice fall, I have to work hard to turn off the part of my brain that quickly attempts to calculate just how religious she really is.

I wish all that time spent on the intricacies of female dress and appearance had been spent teaching me a wider and more complex take on modesty. If I could go back to my teenage self I'd tell her to hide a Bible in her copy of *Hatznea Lechet* and spend those hours studying the story of King David, a man who wrestles constantly with pride and modesty, who is known for being beautiful, but is nonetheless taken seriously as a leader. King David is ultimately a tragic figure, but I learned more from him and his story—when I finally studied it with a chevruta that met in a bar when I was 25—than I ever did from *Hatznea Lechet*.

TAMAR FOX

FROM THE LILITH BLOG

A Letter to Women Scientists Even Younger than I Am

Hilary Green-Lerman, a 25-year-old computational biochemist, shares hard-won wisdom.

Dear Young, Female Scientist,

Welcome to our club, and get used to being the only girl in the room. Things are changing, and you're helping to change them. But for now, take a deep breath, and remember that you worked just as hard as everyone else to get where you are. You're not an impostor. You're just awesome.

Don't worry if others claim that a certain class is easy and you think it's really hard. This isn't a competition; it's your education.

Take a programming class. Just about every area of science has a computational branch doing really exciting work, and desperate for someone with knowledge of Python or Java.

As the only girl in the group, you'll be asked to take notes during lab: don't do it. You want to be at the table doing the dissection, or wiring the circuit, not standing in the background and scribbling notes.

Don't just apply to jobs where you meet every single requirement. They probably won't find someone who can do everything they want; your other talents will put your resume at the top of the pile.

When you get that job, there will be lots of meetings. You'll be tempted to sit at the back of the room. Fight that instinct and sit with the senior scientists. Your opinion matters, and you need to be where they can hear you.

One day, one of your coworkers will make a comment that makes you uncomfortable. Once you are able to articulate what didn't feel right, take him aside and gently explain you didn't think the joke was funny. It'll help him become a nicer person.

Don't let anyone yell at you or interrupt you. If someone tries, even if it's your boss, calmly and privately explain how you want to be treated. It's really scary, but you'll earn respect for standing your ground.

Cultivate some female friends outside of work—at synagogue, conferences, yoga class. Make time for the women in your life; they'll help keep you sane.

Be a mentor because you want to, not because you feel you have to. You signed up to be a scientist, not an activist. If you have some free time, it will be rewarding to meet other women interested in science. You'll be proud to help them find their voices. It's not your second job; it's your privilege as a member of our little club of women in science.

Good luck, and start experimenting!

Your friend,

Hillary

For daily fresh feminist content, check out *Lilith.org/blog*.

"Abductions of girls are sometimes interpreted to mean automatic rape, [and] where the identity of these are revealed, they could be stigmatized even after being rescued."

While the blogosphere and social media were blazing with expressions of outrage and empathy over the April abduction of 280 girls from their school in Nigeria, suggestions of how to help "#BringBackOurGirls" included the publication of the girls' names once they were made known in Nigeria. The assumption was that naming the missing girls would provoke the world to see them as real people urgently in need of international help. But soon a government employee in Nigeria, quoted in *Buzzfeed.com*, May 7, 2014, by **Jina Moore,** announced that once these girls were identified they might never be able to return to their own families and communities without being "marked for life."

"In the U.S., the lifetime risk of maternal death has risen more than 50 percent since we launched our first report in 2000—from 1 in 3,700 to 1 in 2,400. Today, an American woman faces the same lifetime risk of maternal death as a woman in Iran or Romania."

Carolyn Miles, president and CEO of Save the Children, on maternal death rates in the US—and their steady rise. Quoted in the Sisterhood blog, **Elissa Strauss,** May 8, 2014.

ART: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

FROM EXEMPTION TO OBLIGATION

A new legal interpretation expands Jewish women's religious roles dramatically. A landmark vote in April by the Conservative movement's authoritative Committee on Jewish Law and Standards transforms women from being "exempt" from certain rituals or deeds required of males to being "obligated" to perform them. Answering the question: Are Jewish women responsible for observing the mitzvot from which they have traditionally been exempt? Rabbi Pamela Barmash wrote this *teshuva* (response):

"Women are now held equally responsible for the mitzvot as men have been. Women are responsible for the mitzvot of reciting the Shema and the Shemoneh Esreh, wearing tzitzit and donning tefillin, residing in a sukkah, taking up the lulav, hearing the shofar, counting the omer, and studying Torah. ...The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards recognizes that the social status of women entitles them to participate in public ritual." For details: *www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/teshuvot/2011-2020/weiss-dissent-barmash.pdf*

TALIA LAVIN

JEWISH & FEMINIST, ON CAMPUS

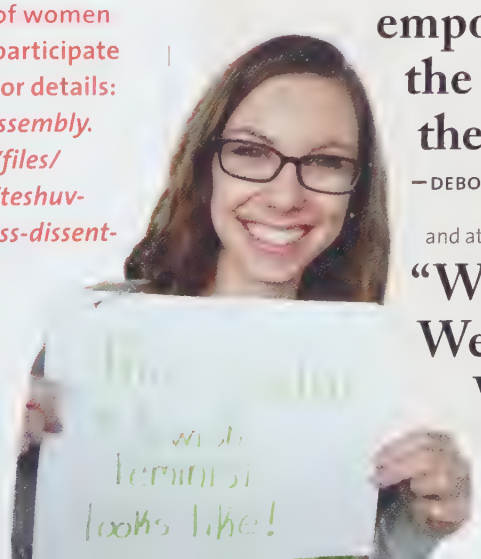
In April, Hillel of Columbia University and Barnard College hosted its first-ever Jewish Feminism week, organized by the non-denominational group Jewish Women on Campus. The group also organized a campaign encouraging students to post images showing "what a Jewish feminist looks like." Here, some quotes and images from the group's Facebook page, reproduced with the original punctuation:

"I am a zionist, orthodox Jewish feminist and I need Jewish feminism because my religion empowers and supports me as a woman and as a member of society—despite what you may think." —JULIE TAUBER

"I am a pro two state reform Jewish feminist and I need Jewish feminism because each of these parts of my identity help to inform, shape, and challenge the other." —EMILY KLEIN

"I am a queer anti-zionist Jewish feminist and I need Jewish feminism to dismantle systems of oppression and practice *tikkun olam*." —MADDY POPKIN

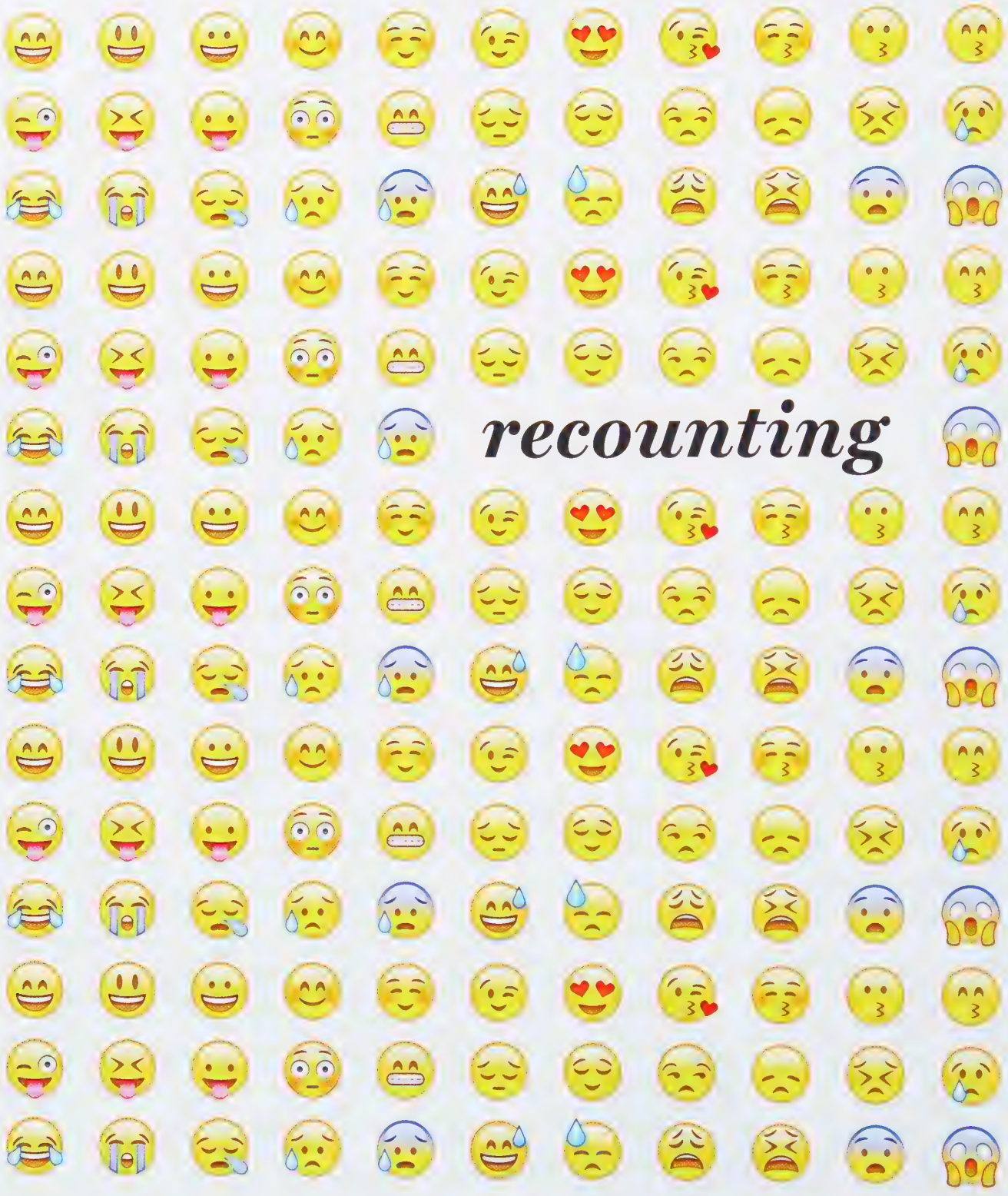
"I need Jewish feminism because it empowers me to have a voice in the way I practice Judaism and in the way I engage with the world." —DEBORAH POLLACK



and at the end of all these, this slogan appeared:

**"We love each other.
We respect each other.
We disagree with each other."**

PHOTOS: JEWISH WOMEN ON CAMPUS



recounting

a short story by COURTNEY SENDER

Your first kiss will be on a dance floor. He will be taller than you; you won't see it coming. You will be fifteen, thinking you will always remember this number for this reason. You will remember this number, but only because your Bubbe will call you in August saying, "Sweet sixteen and never been kissed—true or false?" and you will smile to yourself and think, *false.*

Your second kiss will be so bad that you will believe for the rest of senior year that you are gay. Whenever you doubt this, you will remember how soft and wet his lips were, how poorly aimed. For some reason you will remember your porch light, the dead moth flattened against it, above the mezuzah he doesn't recognize. You will conclude that your eyes were open.

Your third kiss will be on a couch after Rosh Hashanah services your freshman year. It will move to a bed, but it will stay just a kiss. Because you expect this, you will not be grateful for it.

Your third kiss will kiss you two hundred times before you lose track.

Your fourth kiss will balance you on the railing of your best friend's parents' fire escape. It will be your nineteenth birthday. His breath will smell like cabbage. You will cry. He will knock on the bedroom door once you've closed it against him. You will be dialing your third kiss; your best friend will say, *Leave her alone.*

You will forget your fifth kiss. You will not remember his name. You will not remember his face, even.

Your sixth kiss will be thinner than you are, and you are thin. He will take off your bra as you stare at the ceiling, deciding not to help him with the clasp. He will walk you home at midnight—home to your third kiss, though he won't know that. When he asks you out to coffee, you will say yes, but you won't show.

Your seventh kiss will be a friend. You will set down your drink and slide your arms around his neck. You will act surprised when he kisses you, but you will not be surprised.

You will remember your eighth kiss as laughter, as tricky to pull off because neither of you could stop, as if you were kissing laughter. Your eighth kiss will disappoint you in all ways but this. In this way, he will be your favorite.

You will walk the perimeter of the club where you meet your ninth kiss, being watched. You will be watched because you feel powerful. You will feel powerful because you are watched. Your ninth kiss will take a lollipop out of his mouth next to the DJ booth. You will lick it.

You will want to forget that lollipop. You never will.

In your memory, you will mix up your tenth and eleventh kisses. One of them will be the son of a minister. One of them will be younger than you thought he was. One of them will call you beautiful.

The moment he walks in, your twelfth kiss will push you against your closet door. You will want this part to last forever, but it will only last a second.

Your thirteenth kiss will glide his hand along your hip for an hour before you turn to face him. He will say, *How long were you going to pretend to be asleep?* You will tell him he's damn lucky you were just pretending.

You will be grateful then that your third kiss stayed just a kiss.

Your fourteenth kiss will be very late at night, and exquisite. You will walk to the bathroom on wobbly knees, wearing his boxers. As you are kissing him, you will be wanting to kiss him again. You will be dazed for days.

You will meet your fifteenth kiss early in the morning, as you are walking home on wobbly knees.

When it rains it pours, you will think.

Your sixteenth kiss will give you the flu. You will turn away the chicken soup he makes you from scratch. You will start to worry about the things you can get from the people you kiss.

Just before Passover, your seventeenth kiss will give you a neckfull of hickies. "Take your scarf off at the table," your Bubbe will say. You won't. You'll touch the knot too often, feeling owned.

You will get tired of remembering kisses. You will skip some. You will feel bad about skipping some, feel bad that just remembering makes you tired. You will wonder if they remember you. You will wonder if it makes them tired.

You will believe that you could have loved your twentieth kiss. When you step off the karaoke stage, he will touch your hip and say *You look good in a red dress*, and for years afterward the memory of this will make you fidget. It will be a mistake, telling him about your third kiss. You will try to make up for it. You will leave a gift outside his door. Thumbtacks, because his walls are naked. Thumbtacks, so when he hangs pictures of other people, he will still see you.

Your twenty-third kiss will be older than you, and married. He will leave his wife for you, is what he'll say. There will be a photo of you, eyelids shimmering, earrings dangling to your shoulders, not looking at the camera, because you are searching the party for him.

Your twenty-fourth kiss will be wearing a shirt that says Can I Help You? He will be Muslim, the president of the graduate

student body, leading your first day of orientation. After his talk, you will slip through the swarm of students and lean against the podium at the front of the lecture hall. You will say, *Yes*. He'll knit his eyebrows, and you'll say, *You can help me*.

You will feel bad about your twenty-eighth kiss, because it will happen in a metro station below the earth as your twenty-seventh kiss is standing just above your head, waiting for you.

Over drinks, your thirtieth kiss will say: *Never get involved with someone in your cohort*. You will talk about your shared advisor until he leans on the bar and kisses you, doesn't even hold your face in place. He will gather your gloved hand and his gloved hand together in his jacket pocket. Later, you will hate him for not grabbing your face. You will hate him for assuming you would sit there, frozen, and let him kiss you whenever he amassed the whiskey and the nerve.

A year after your thirty-first kiss, you will meet again at a Christmas party. He will be tall and smartly dressed, thick-framed glasses and a tie. You will be drunk. You will introduce yourself. You will think, *Better to be the forgetter than the forgotten*.

You will think that, but you will not be sure.

Your thirty-fifth kiss will walk to his bathroom for a condom. You'll say no, for secret reasons of your own, but he'll say, *Not for that. Just to be extra safe, for any kind of touching*. He'll mean it. You'll feel suspicious and suspected, dirty though the two of you are uncommonly clean.

You will start to lie. You will say you have kissed fewer people and slept with more.

Your thirty-seventh kiss will be thinner than you are, but you are not thin anymore. He will read to you from *The Waste Land*. You will rest your head on his shoulder and believe you could love him, but the feeling will fade by the end of the page. You will wonder what your third kiss is doing now.

You will realize with shock that your third kiss was only your third kiss.

Your fortieth kiss won't know you're somehow still a virgin. You will be too ashamed to tell him. You will be grateful to him afterward, when he walks you home at midnight—home to your third kiss, you will have spent years imagining. Home to no one, really.

You will sleep with your forty-first kiss the night you meet him, feeling the freedom more than the deed. You'll assume he won't call you again, and you'll be right, but that will not have been the point.

You will know that your fiftieth kiss is your fiftieth kiss. You will feel like a Russian doll, your former selves stacked ever smaller and deeper inside you. You will let the smallest of these kiss this one, just this once. Her delighted surprise will make her foreign to you: a stranger. A lollipop from someone else's tongue.

Your fifty-first kiss will want to hear about your third kiss. You will remember funneling thumbtacks into a glass jar, and you will know not to tell him. He will tell you his equivalent, instead. You won't like it. You will kiss him in the dark foyer of your apartment, hoping even as you pull his head to yours that your memory of this moment will be monochrome, fuzzy and flat.

You will get tired of remembering kisses. You will wonder if they remember you.

From a single photograph, your Bubbe will identify which of those men was your fifty-fourth kiss. It will comfort you, that you can still be so transparent to someone.

Your Bubbe will die then.

One week after the funeral, your housemate will move out and a boy you'll believe you could love will move in. He will be the first Jewish boy you've looked at since your third kiss. You will stand in the supermarket aisle, comparing the labels on the one-a-day multivitamins you want to buy him. You will take a break from kissing for so long that he will finish the whole bottle. He will not be your fifty-fifth kiss.

Your fifty-sixth kiss will be a way of kissing your housemate. It will not be the way you want. It will taste bitter, though you will both drink peach martinis with sugar on the rim.

You will wonder if any kiss will ever be the way you want again. You will tell your fifty-eighth kiss that your contacts are just bothering you. Standing at the bathroom mirror, you will try to calculate the number of times your third kiss kissed you. Ten thousand, you will conclude. A hundred thousand.

You will try to remember every one. ■

Courtney Sender's fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in Glimmer Train, Crazyhorse, Esquire, and elsewhere. Find her online at www.courtneysender.com.

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THE SHABBAT BEFORE HER WEDDING

She is the braid of the challah
twisted between second grade bible stories
and the breath of modern Israel. She is turning
off the oven, placing trays of sliced meat
and bowls of sectioned fruit onto the lazy Susan.
She is the candle that has not yet been lit,
the matches on the ledge behind the sink
waiting to be taken, to be brushed along
the coarse striking surface, a wavering flame.
She remembers the dozens of times she opened
the front door to the smells of the rabbi's Shabbat
during college, the homecoming of flavors
that committed her to kosher.
Her fiancé in the bedroom now
tries to memorize the blessings, the transliteration,
figuring out how the mixing of their blood
will work for the unborn children.
She is the heat of the kitchen after the steam
of her food has slowed, the shadow of her grandmother
setting silverware on linen napkins, her hand
miming the pride of Jewish women.

JAMIE WENDT

A Feminist Camp Counselor Unpacks Her Baggage

by MAYA ZINKOW

The summer after my sophomore year at Barnard, I had just begun to crack open this thing called gender, hearing and welcoming the particular voices central to the canon of a women's college curriculum. I learned a new language, that of Virginia Woolf and Betty Friedan, of Judith Butler and Alice Walker, and became more fluent with every class discussion, every conversation with friends over potluck dinners of quinoa, Brussels sprouts bathed in balsamic vinegar, and vegan desserts. The glossy Barnard brochures had assured me that I would become the women I saw in the pictures: confident, well-read, transformed. Finally, after two years, it was beginning to happen.

Then, suddenly: Summer! In the middle of my college career, already feeling like a changed person, I was returning to a place that seldom changes, a place that I loved deeply—my Jewish summer camp. I'd gone to camp nearly every other summer of my life, so I knew the feeling of returning to a powerfully familiar location as someone new. With colorful braces when I was 10, finally without braces at 15, and with a different haircut when at long last my curls developed. Camp could always embrace superficial changes like these. As campers, we relish that moment when we step off the bus bearing these new parts of ourselves, knowing that friends will embrace us warmly whether our acne has cleared up or not. And counselors are taught to create a space where a camper can return year after year and be his or her truest self. But deep internal change is harder to accommodate in a space that must remain a familiar and idyllic home for the hundreds of campers who return every summer.

That summer after my sophomore year, my third on staff, I arrived with more than just a new hairdo and an updated wardrobe. This time I came with new ideas as well, and I found it far more difficult to ease comfortably back into a world where girls spent hours in front of a mirror primping for Shabbat, where boys shot "Go clean your kitchen" jokes at the girls across the dining hall, and where the sexual histories of campers past and present were documented on cabin walls in pink nail polish and Sharpie ink.

I had been transplanted from my haven at Barnard, where every class took an intersectional approach to history, sociology, and literature, where professors invited students to discuss everything from politics to prostitution, where my friends and I stayed up late talking about gender and Judaism until we realized our papers on the same subjects were due the next morning and hadn't been written yet. In Women in Israel, we discussed the complications of women in the public spaces of a religious democracy. In American Women of the 20th Century, I uncovered the U.S. history that I'd never found in my high school textbooks, their pages shining with the feats of our country's founding straight white men. In Sociology of Gender, I learned that gender is performative, something that is built in the social interactions of our everyday life. Through it all, I simultaneously learned how to recognize the ways I had been held back by my various identities, how to reflect critically on life experiences and interactions with peers, friends, and superiors, and—yes—how to check my privilege.

At camp I quickly became the token feminist on my staff, struggling to reconcile all that I had learned at college with certain stark realities of camp life: Living spaces were designed and assigned in accordance with the gender binary. All boys at our Conservative camp were required to pray in tallit and tefillin, while girls were given a half-hearted, non-obligatory opportunity to do so. The rampant heteronormative hookup culture fueled peer pressure, caused campers who had no interest in participating to feel isolated, and threatened the idea of camp as a safe space to try new experiences.

How could I be my truest self in a place that no longer seemed to embrace all that I believed in?

Now it's two years later, and on the cusp of my graduation from Barnard I packed up once again for summer at camp, this time as a division head. My love for camp has clearly endured, and there has been a significant energy change in camp leadership since I boarded the busses two summers ago, but I haven't stopped thinking about that challenging summer after my sophomore year. So this spring, in anticipation of the summer to come, I decided to better prepare myself for the transition into that world. On a sunny Shabbat afternoon, a few weeks before the end of my last semester, I invited friends and peers—a diverse group of campniks

PHOTO: FOUNDATION FOR JEWISH CAMP

who spanned the Jewish and gender spectrums—to find out if their own concerns and experiences were similar. Sitting in a campfire-style circle on the main lawn of Barnard's campus, surrounded by academic conversations and urban traffic, the feel of the grass beneath our toes seemed to bring us back to our respective camps, allowing us to relive similar frustrations, but also the pleasures and transformative powers of camp. We started with a simple question: What is the one space in your camp where you have always been most aware of gender dynamics? In classic camp fashion, we went around the circle. One young man who had spent many summers at a Reform movement camp discussed the implications of showering with friends, recognizing now what he hadn't as a boy: that this was an environment unwelcoming to potentially queer cabin mates. Another man chimed in that communal showering at his Conservative camp always seemed to him to be a "mark of true manhood," a bonding activity, and he now regrets shunning friends who'd seemed uncomfortable with the ritual.

Ritual was a word that came up often, whether to describe moments of single-gender bonding—like "army night" for men and "spa day" for girls—or to discuss the gendered nature of specific Jewish activities and practices. A woman who'd attended Orthodox camp every summer interpreted the gendered clothing restrictions for children of all ages as body-policing, at times even slut-shaming. Several women expressed their frustrations at being one of just a few females at their camps to wear tallit and tefillin every morning. I was one of these women at my own camp, which espouses egalitarian principles, and I still struggle with the idea of ritual obligation, and with the fact that girls who take on the mitzvah report feeling immediately othered, and a little alienated from their peers, starting that very first morning when they show up to services ready to wrap themselves in prayer along with the guys. That afternoon on the college lawn, in a space we'd created for ourselves that never seemed to exist at camp, we hashed it all out. No one was the token anything.

Through all these topics, we kept coming back to role modeling. How do we extract these damaging social structures from camp without destroying the sacred, necessary realities of tradition and familiarity? How can we bring all that we know into our jobs as role models in this specific context, in a place with certain established values, religious and otherwise?

Here is the paradox: While camp is theoretically a place where children are free to explore all aspects of their identity, and where every child's unique personality is meant to be celebrated, it is also a place that strives for sameness in Jewish ritual and values, in behavior, in a shared agreement to live life in a certain way for eight weeks of the year, with the hope that campers will bring those values home with them come August.

One woman joining us on the grass that day spoke about being aware of a clear divide among her campers. There were those girls who seemed to be made for camp: they presented as straight, they enjoyed the daily activities of camp, they were outgoing and funny, they participated in the prevalent hookup culture, and all the while benefited—albeit passively—from the intense and totally immersive Jewish environment. And then there were the other girls: shy, quiet, girls who preferred reading on their bunk beds to gossiping over manicures, girls who slept through the night instead of sneaking out to the boys' side of camp, girls for whom counselors had to work hard to ensure their summers were fun, fulfilling, and safe. "Who am I a counselor for?" this staff member asked. "Am I a counselor for the kids who live and breathe camp, who are maybe the camp ideal? Or for the kids who don't easily conform to the sameness camp tries, in some ways, to achieve?"

How could I be my truest self in a place that no longer seemed to embrace all that I believed in?

I'm taking her questions along with me on my way up to camp this year. Given camp's unique power to take children out of their habitual environments for two months out of the year, to give them the space to grow in a place free of parents, school pressures, and limitations on living engaged Jewish lives, these questions are especially important.

In this liminal space, we focus heavily on giving children a taste of ideal Jewish living: we discuss the weekly Torah portion in circles similar to the one my friends and I created just weeks ago, we pray in beautiful natural environments, we sprinkle Hebrew into every conversation, and we strive to create a *kehila*, a community of meaningful relationships.

Just as we strive to open up our youngsters to new modes of Jewish practice, we also have the opportunity to use the transcendent space of camp to challenge other limitations the modern world places on us, not only as Jews but also as gendered beings in a binaried culture. At camp this summer, and every summer, I want us to gather in circles to ask the questions that matter. Let us diversify our notions of gendered ideals within Jewish tradition. Let us think critically about the messages conveyed by dress codes, obligation, and same-sex bonding activities. Let us create positive changes instead of the tired sexism so common in the camp experience.

This summer, I'm adding these ideas to my packing list, along with a well-worn Barnard sweatshirt: Be the counselor who does not assume heterosexuality of your campers or their parents. Be the counselor who pushes for more meaningful gender-based activities. Be the counselor who welcomes open conversations about Jewish practice, who is honest about your personal journey with ritual. Be the counselor who can mediate sensitively those situations that unintentionally shut out some campers. Be a leader. ■

FOR MORE ON CAMP, visit *Lilith.org* to read "Teenage Girls Who Like Their Bodies? Get Out!!" about body discovery at summer camp; "Capitalist Day," about a thought experiment at a socialist Zionist summer camp; and more.

Lot's Wife

a biblical revisioning by MICHAL LEMBERGER

She sat in a small patch of shade, churning the goat's milk to butter. The courtyard was quiet with work, one daughter at the oven baking bread, the other grinding flour for tomorrow's loaves. It was good to have these girls, she thought, who had learned their way and were of use to those around them.

Slowly, the butter started to come. They'd have it tonight with the bread her daughter was baking.

Good, clean food, but she would admit to counting down to the next feast day, when they'd offer up a ram if the year continued so well. Already preparing the juiciest parts in her mind, crushed figs to bring out the meat's succulence, cloves for pungency, she let her mind wander and didn't hear the men's voices until they were inside the house.

Her husband came to the doorway. *We have visitors. Traders from Egypt. One of the field hands will bring in a goat. We'll need a full meal.*

She already had a fire lit when the boy brought the plump animal. While the girls continued to bake and churn, their mother quickly slit its throat and hung it upside down to drain. Once it was skinned, she quartered and pounded it so it would grill quickly and stay tender, then ran her hands and eyes over red lentils she spread across the ground, picked out the tiny stones that would masquerade themselves in the pot and ruin the dish.

The courtyard rustled with activity. It smelled of death and fire, cumin and bread. *The scents*, she thought, *of a good life.*

Amid the bustle of work, she looked at her daughters, 13 and 14, older than she'd been when she was married off, taken away from the tents to another land.

At least they lived in the city. She had this courtyard, with its round stove and barrel of flour. Women to sit with in the square at shearing time. It was more than she ever expected. But she would keep her girls closer. She could feel her old age

"CLEFT" BY MARY FRANK
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND DC MOORE GALLERY, NEW YORK AND ELENA ZANG GALLERY, WOODSTOCK, NEW YORK

coming in the creases of her knees and shoulders. She needed her daughters.

Too bad we aren't preparing for a real feast, she thought, something to bring everyone together, especially after the recent infighting. Rich men are not to be trusted, she knew. A poor man might steal a donkey or goat. But a rich man will start a war over an entire herd.

Lot had gotten through these arguments before. This time, Pildash, who already had a bigger flock and more pasture than anyone else, accused him of taking the best grazing land. But they had to live together. Someone would slip some coins to the other. It would be taken care of.

The shouting began as the men settled down to eat. Muffled at first, but soon closer, and then someone banged on the door.

Let us see these strangers you have taken into your home, one yelled. Another jeered, *Bring them out so we can get to know them.*

A howl of laughter went up from the crowd. She recognized some of the voices. Men with grudges against Lot, or the poor who resented his wealth.

She hurried up to the roof and peeked over the edge. Nearly 20 men, one egging them on. Usually, the other wealthy men in the town could be counted as Lot's closest friends, and his only peers. But here was Pildash, shouting encouragement. *So, this is how he'll get what he wants*, she thought, *embarrass my husband in public.* Make him look bad enough and he just might give up that pastureland without a fight. *Rich men and their pride*, she thought.

No one noticed her up there. But they wouldn't. Life happened horizontally in Sodom—everyone on an even plane, landowners and the shovelers of shit all living side by side. It meant nothing. Four men still paid everyone else's wages. But if you can see them sleeping and waking it's easy to overlook how much more they have than you ever will.

No one would pay attention to a woman anyway. So no one saw her as she watched Lot open their door and step out into the hostility and the evening.

Friends, what can I do for you? he asked, as if he hadn't heard their demands or anger.

Give us the strangers! the men called out.

Lot tried to speak, but they cut him off, closing in and poking him in the chest. *All this over some grass*, she thought, with a small twinge of worry. But she pushed it out of her mind. Her husband would work it out. They'd all go back to their dinners.

She watched Lot grow scared. He raised his voice.

Friends. You know I deal honestly.

What are they paying you? one voice called out.

Why should you get all their bounty? yelled another.

Finally, Pildash spoke. *You shouldn't be the only one with the honor of hosting them. Bring them out. Let's see how tight their assholes are.*

Again, the crowd surged, but Lot continued, fear audible in every word. *I have offered them a meal and a bed for the night. That is all.*

It wasn't working. The men were getting more worked up. She heard the door slam as Lot rushed back in, and ran down to find him flustered, his cloak ripped at the neck.

I have to do something, he said to her. *They'll break into our house and drag these poor men into the street.*

They're a drunk and worked-up mob, she replied. *Throw them some coins and they'll be happy.*

They'll do unnatural things to those men. I cannot let my guests be raped by a bunch of drunken farmhands.

They don't want to do any harm, she said, with as much vehemence as she dared in the face of his overweening pride. *Go out with a few skins of wine, compliments of the visitors.*

You're not listening! What do you think "let us see how tight their assholes are" means?

It means they want to see if they have gold hidden under their clothes.

Lot didn't hear her. He paced, head bent in concentration.

Finally he said, *Go get the girls.*

The girls?

My daughters. We'll give them instead.

You're going to throw our children to that mob? Are you crazy?

Finally, he looked at her. *I have no choice. Our family's honor is on the line.*

Fully hysterical now, she cried, *Those men will kill our girls. They will rip them apart from the inside and leave them for dead. How much honor can you have if you are willing to let that happen to your own children?*

They will do that to my guests! To men! You're the one who said they won't rape anyone.

I said they wouldn't rape the travelers. But our girls have only their bodies. If, by some miracle, they survive what twenty grown men do to them, we'll never be able to marry them off. You'll ruin them forever.

In tears, she clawed at her husband's clothing. But Lot had heard enough.

Get them now. He turned and stepped out again. She only heard the first few words—*friends! I've come with an offer*—before the door closed behind him.

She only had a few minutes. She ran back to the courtyard, grabbed whatever she could—tufts of goatskin, batches of raw wool, and a pot of oil cooling by the fire. All the while, she shouted to the girls, *Run up to the roof. Grab whatever valuables you see on your way. Gold coins, jewelry, anything.*

She stuffed the wool into a piece of still-bloody goatskin, grabbed an unlit torch and thrust it into the oven. After its end caught, she ran upstairs. When her daughters followed, each carrying a bulging saddlebag, she was already putting the torch to the hay pile in the corner.

Mama! they cried. *What are you doing? We'll burn up!*

We'll be long gone by the time this is big enough to harm us.

Slowly, a wisp of smoke rose from the hay pile. Once it did, she started grabbing tufts of wool and shoving them at her children. *Start lighting them*, she directed.

Confused and scared, the girls did as they were told. She hopped from their roof to the neighbor's, grabbing a flaming ball of wool, hurling it down into the narrow street in front of her house. The girls followed, handing her their fiery missiles as they moved. They went from rooftop to rooftop, setting each hay pile alight, throwing more projectiles down to the city below.

Mama, panted the younger girl, *what are we doing? They'll kill us when they realize what we've done.*

They can't see us, she said. *If anyone thinks to look up, we'll already be gone.*

But what are we trying to do? cried the older girl. *I don't understand.*

I'm saving you, was the only answer she gave.

From below, they heard screaming as people noticed the cramped city was on fire. A few men near Lot's house had been hit. They rolled on the ground, screaming in fear and pain as they were consumed.

What vengeance is this? came the people's desperate cry. *Why does God rain down fire on us?*

Panic spread as people trampled others to save their own homes. By then, she and her daughters had reached a narrow patch of city wall. She was sure her daughters could jump down to the ground, but her body was already feeling the effects of the run across the city's rooftops. *Just see them to safety*, she thought. *They are all that matters.*

Throw away the wool, she told her daughters. She flung the still-burning torch as far as she could. *Now, jump.*

Once down, she shouted, *Head for the lake. Don't stop and don't turn around. There's nothing here for us anymore.*

The girls took off across the flat land. She followed as fast as she could, but her breasts pounded painfully against her chest. She struggled to find breath.

Eventually, she felt the ground change beneath her feet. She was closer to the lake. Up ahead, she saw the surface of the water wink behind her daughters. But she couldn't take another step. She was too tired. Her breath caught with every inhalation.

Bending over, her chest heaved painfully. Her arms and legs shook from the effort of getting this far.

Standing back up, the blood rushed away from her head, sent her reeling, turning her to face the way she'd come. In the distance, Sodom still burned, higher than she ever thought possible.

Only then did what she had done hit her with its full force. Images of the life she had led passed through her mind. It was all gone. Her husband, who would have whored his own daughters out to serve his pride, was in there too, and she felt, in that moment, what it was to lose an entire life's work, a history of love and loss.

For the first time, she saw what her hands had wrought. *I have killed and I have destroyed to save my own*, she thought.

It was then, her body struggling to reassert itself, her mind fighting to align her pride at saving her children with grief at losing her whole valued life and horror at what she had done, that she started to cry. Huge, dehydrated tears poured down her face, sobs wracked her body. She sank down, crying harder even than the morning her own mother had sent her away into her new marriage, into the long life ahead.

Her husband would have whored his own daughters out to serve his pride.

She didn't want her daughters to see her cry, but she couldn't stop. Something had opened within her. She could not close it.

Stand up, Mama, they said. *You have to keep moving or your muscles will cramp.*

She would get up. She would let her daughters half-carry her along the lake's shoreline and into the hills. She would find a cave for them, sleep with her girls curled around her like lambs. She would wake the next morning to explain they could never return to their home, would have to forget all they had ever known and look only to the future. She would calm them when their fear of God's wrath shook within them. She would explain that they had done God's work, or the work God should have done when a man would ask a mother to sacrifice her virgin daughters for his own stupid honor. She would tell them they were instruments of God's wrath, that God had guided their hands when they set their home alight.

And after they all slept again, she would face their anger when they accused her of making sure there would be no man alive who would have them. She would soothe them, say the riches they had stuffed into the saddlebags would buy them a new life. She would promise to find a way.

She would keep that promise, purchase land where they could live. She would buy sheep and goats, hire field hands and shepherds. When they had enough new wealth, she would find husbands for her daughters. She would see them grow large with child. She would hold her grandchildren on her lap and know she had done something good. But for all that she would go on to do, Lot's wife would never rise from that spot by the side of the moonlit lake. She would never stop crying fat, salty tears for the life she left behind in flames. ■

Michal Lemberger, a writer and poet, lives in Los Angeles. This piece is part of a collection to be published in Spring 2015 by Prospect Park Books.

The Art of Ornament

by LAURA KRUGER

Israel boasts an exciting and very hip cadre of extraordinary visual artists, yet their work in jewelry design and fashion can elude the radar. Time to take notice! For many decades, this work—much of it by women—has been created in a fascinating space between cutting-edge and traditional, pushing the boundaries of how we think to adorn ourselves. Here, an introduction to some very dramatic "worn ornaments" made by women artists—in different eras and emerging from diverse cultures—since the founding of the State of Israel.

Bridal jewellery, Sana'a, Yemen, 1930s–1940s, silver and gilt-silver filigree and granulation, corals, coins, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

PHOTO: MAURO MAGLIANI

Jewelry in Israel (Arnoldsche Art Publishers, 2013) is a bravura book featuring more than 60 unique contemporary Israeli artist/jewelers by art historian, Iris Fischof. This exceptional volume brings to international attention the astonishing diversity of talent, expertise and creativity of Israeli artists working in the format of jewelry objects. Fishof rightly contends that each artist's voice is an individual statement clarifying the 'idea' of jewelry worn as adornment, as personal/political identification, empowerment, as status and prestige. The artists have been selected for their singular concepts and command of technique. Each is highly skilled, envisioning a sculptural form both wearable and thought provoking. Precious metals and gemstones have a low importance but texture, color, surface and pattern are used with ingenuity. Fishof clearly identifies the maker's national background, academic affiliation, age and life events, careful not to label this diversity as the collective definition of 'Israeli'.

The sub-title of this book is one of its strengths, *Multicultural Diversity 1948 to the Present*, with chapters dealing on the 'melting pot' period of immigration, 1950–1970, international outreach, and support of fellow artists 1950–1970 and in the 1970's, of world acclaim. Four of these jeweler/artists that found global recognition, are Bianca Eshel Gershuni, Vered Kaminski, Esther Knobel and Daganit Stern Schocken. The shared history of Holocaust, immigration, internal political strife, constant tensions both physical and psychological have led to a vocabulary of materials and images like none other.

Gorgeous as much of this work is, it is the impact of such pieces such as 'fish-airplane' brooches by Gershuni, crafted during the Gulf War (1991), the repeated, referential use of metal webbing, a reminder of the windscreen protective mesh during the period of the Intifada attacks in 1987–2000, by Vered Kaminski and the motif of memorial wreaths for fallen protectors by amongst others, Michal Bar-On Shaish. These artists turned tragic events and industrial/found object materials into beautiful personal jewelry challenging the intent to annihilate and destroy. The most potent of Jewish symbols, the *Mogen David* star is

Bianca Eshel Gershuni, bracelet, c. 1970, 18-ct to 24-ct gold, coral, pearls, collection of Helen W. Drutt English, Philadelphia, PA.

Vered Kaminski, brooch, 2010, silver, turquoise, presented by Israel's President Shimon Peres to German Chancellor Angela Merkel, 2010.

BRACELET PHOTO: KEN YANOVIAK, BROOCH PHOTO: VERED KAMINSKI

used sparingly, except in an inverted reference to the mandatory Nazi identity badge, the 'yellow star/Jude'. Instead several artists including Zoya Cherkassy and Degnit Stern Schocken create positive I.D. brooches in delicately wrought 18k gold, turning a dangerous negative into praise worthy pride.

Historically, jewelers evolved from family based workshops/businesses. Jews were barred entry in any of the European 'guilds ' and trade associations commencing in the 14th century. Unable to learn professional skills, the outsider tradition of the self-taught passed generationally, inspired by native, local craft traditions and importantly included women as workers. Many highly competent women were the unseen, unsung anonymous fabricators of jewelry. Since the 1948 founding of the State of Israel, women have been accepted as equals on the battlefield, on the collective farms and in the jewelry studios.

Israeli support for the arts continues to grow, with the leading educational sources for professional jewelry/handmade objects being the Bezalel Academy in Jerusalem and the Shenkar College of Engineering and Design in Ramat Gan. In 2006, Edgar Bronfman created an annual prize, the Andy, memory of his wife Andrea, herself a great collector and supporter of contemporary Israeli crafts. Recognition of this award is furthered by an annual solo exhibition in the Eretz-Israel Museum, Tel Aviv.

In singling out any of the more than 60 distinctive artists applauded in this volume I do so based on my many professional years in the contemporary jewelry world as a dealer, curator and collector.

These artists are featured in fine art galleries and contemporary museum jewelry collections throughout the world. The photography and art direction of this volume is of the highest order, appropriate for this sophisticated art book. ■

Laura Kruger is the curator of the Hebrew Union College Museum, New York, and the former owner of the Kruger Gallery in New York.

Deganit Stern Schocken, Mouth, pendant from the series "Figure of Speech", 2011, stainless steel, polystyrene, gold, silver, zircon, nylon, cotton thread.

Esther Knobel, Requiem, box pendants, 1994, copper, brass, cotton thread.

MOUTH PENDANT PHOTO: URI GRUN, BOX PENDANTS PHOTO: MICHAEL TROPEA

Natasha Basin-Levina (1951–2013) emigrated to Israel from Moscow in 1970. She worked as a journalist and editor for Israeli radio and for Kol Yisrael television, where she was head of news and Russian-language programs, but much of her writing was discovered only after her death. This autobiographical story was first published in the Jerusalem Russian-language journal Alternativa, under the title "Terror on Ben Yehuda Street" ["Terakt na Ben-Iegude"].

THE EXPLOSION

by NATASHA BASIN-LEVINA

translated by SONIA MELNIKOVA-RAICH

I inherited the old wall clock ten years ago from my mother, who had in turn received it from her father. It had not been running for many years and my mother insisted that it stopped when my grandfather died, but it stayed on the wall anyway.

I took the clock down after the fourth of September 1997. I couldn't bear to look at it any longer because the time it showed happened to be the exact time of the explosion. I was in the kitchen at the time, trying to be a perfect mother, squeezing some fresh apple juice for my two teenage daughters. That day we all got up late, the girls were still walking around in their pajamas and Basin was still lying in bed in his favorite pose watching TV. I had just squeezed the last apple when I heard the explosion. I rushed towards the open balcony door to look outside. Before I could reach it, I heard the second explosion and was thrown back into the room together with shards of broken glass, pieces of window frames, and a tangled mass of human flesh. Then I heard the third explosion. Through the bedroom door I could see Basin digging himself out from under the blanket covered with debris. I saw my younger daughter Danilka coming out of her room, her eyes frozen in terror, and then I heard a horrifying scream from my older daughter Anya. When I turned in the direction of the scream I saw the walls of the kitchen crumbling, the cabinets collapsing, and the bathroom door, twisted and torn off the hinges, collapsing and wedging itself in the rubble, blocking the doorway to the bathroom. Somewhere behind that door was my daughter. The screaming either stopped or got drowned in the chorus of other screams conjoined into one unified wail. I imagined the bathroom ceiling no longer supported by the walls collapsing too and thought it was the end and I did not have my older daughter any more.

And then I screamed too. I was holding my head and screaming and at the same time with some part of my consciousness watching myself as if from outside my body and thinking how ridiculous it looked, a disheveled woman standing in the middle of the kitchen holding her head and screaming, and with yet another part of my consciousness registering that I had seen it somewhere before and that I was just reenacting a scene from a Bergman movie. I was still screaming when Danilka rushed onto the balcony and from there climbed into the girls' room window and then into the bathroom through another door and then back the same way with Anya, who was alive and unscathed. We were all alive and none of us had a single scratch. Everybody said it was a miracle.

We started cleaning right away. The apartment was in ruins, the entire floor covered with broken glass and other debris. We were cleaning and Basin kept offering us something to drink. Anya would periodically start crying but Danilka was not saying anything and her eyes looked dead. I was trying to stay calm and to be in charge but I already knew that we would never be able to manage this by ourselves.

The telephone was ringing incessantly. I would pick it up and mechanically answer, yes we are alive but I cannot talk right now I will call you later. Irina Reichwarger from Tel Aviv called

Natasha Basin-Levina in front of a painting by her husband, Anatoly Basin, 1984.

several times, I told her to wait a minute, put the phone down on the table and forgot about her. Later somebody called her back but by that time she had already told everybody in Tel Aviv that I had fainted while we were talking and was lying unconscious, and we all laughed imagining how ridiculous it would be, Natasha fainting and lying around when there was so much work to do.

I miss Irina a lot. She died several years later when she fell down the stairs.

Kol Israel called and asked me for an interview, "as a victim of a terrorist attack." I agreed—it would be awkward to say no to former colleagues. Our apartment, now doorless and windowless, filled up with street noise, the wailing of sirens and screaming and shouting. We turned on the TV but I did not want to see it so I let Basin watch and describe what he saw. Evidently three Hamas men blew themselves up in the middle of the pedestrian mall right in front of our apartment building on Ben Yehuda Street. Three young girls were killed and there were many wounded.

We continued cleaning like robots, putting the glass and other debris into boxes and small fragments of human flesh into plastic bags. Danilka whispered Kadish over each bag. I stepped out onto the balcony and realized that no help was coming—we were surrounded and blocked off by police and security men. They were guarding the victims and were not letting anybody into the area except for contractors, journalists and photographers—it was their livelihood after all. Misha Gendelev was the first who managed to sneak in—he put on his best clothes and convinced the police that he was some sort of VIP. I broke into tears and we hugged. He grabbed some thick art books and propped up the kitchen shelves. Then we picked up the broken dishes and continued cleaning. It seemed like there would be no end to this cleaning. Then Gendelev hurt his back and left and we were all alone again.

Misha died a year ago and there is nobody left to offer me a shoulder to cry on. Then again, there is Basin.

The police arrived. They made sure that we were all alive and then they broke into the neighbor's apartment below but did not find his body. Luckily, he was not home at the time of the explosion. He died several years later. First he disappeared, then we noticed a strange smell in the stairway and the police had to break into his apartment again. They found him sitting on the toilet, dead. A heart attack.

The Chevra Kadisha people came several times. They collected large body parts and left the rest to us. I filled a small bag with human flesh and walked downstairs. Danilka spread her arms trying to stop me but I did not listen, let me go what's the matter with you? Stepping on the thick layer of broken glass was like walking on smoldering coals but I made it downstairs, got outside and handed the bag to a policeman. Next to our door I saw a girl's body. One of her legs had a small black shoe on and the other leg was missing.

Suddenly I felt I had no strength left—run, run far away no matter where, I thought dejectedly, knowing at the same time

PHOTO COURTESY A. BASIN

that it was insane, that all of it was insane, inside of me and outside, and I just had to wait patiently until this insanity vanished.

The house filled with strangers. One was a *shamai* named Yaki and another was a contractor named Mikhael. The shamai was writing down all the damage and I kept telling him that I wanted everything to be just as it was before. You are strange, he said, look, here is a crack in the toilet and the glass in this picture is broken, and you're telling me that it was like that before, but we can fix it, who cares, everybody does it. But I kept saying that I wanted everything to be just as it was before, including the picture. Then three women social workers arrived. They looked at us with poorly concealed pessimism and tried to convince us to move to a hotel but we declined and continued to clean. The telephone kept ringing. An odd feeling came over me as if nothing had happened, life had not changed, and it simply was always like this.

And then I couldn't bear it any longer. My first husband, I sobbed, Levin, was wounded during the Yom Kippur War just a day before the ceasefire can you believe it we just got married and they were supposed to give him a vacation and the day before the war started he went to the base to hand over his arms and they did not let him go back home and I managed to get through on the phone but at first they wouldn't believe me and a girl told me don't you get it we're in the war and they are in the Golan but he actually was sent to Sinai and those who were sent to the Golan were all killed and he was wounded and developed gangrene he had three surgeries and they saved his leg and my second husband Basin in 1985 was doing his *miluim* and they told me on the phone that he was killed and they were looking for his body and I became a widow but only for a short time the next day those morons apologized and sent me some cookies and I . . .

I REALIZED THAT IN A PLAY ABOUT A TERRORIST ATTACK EVERYBODY IS ASSIGNED A ROLE, AND THIS WAS MINE.

Then I got hold of myself—stop the hysteria you idiot tell them also about your difficult relationship with your mother and that you are not sure if Basin loves you and that you had difficult deliveries both times. I shut up and offered the social workers some water. They left but kept coming back and I kept offering them water. But they did not drink it. They just took me aside and whispered keep an eye on the younger one, she looks frozen, and then they left. They proved to be right but there was nothing to be done about it.

The next thing I remember was Danilka begging me to stop screaming at a TV cameraman but I continued screaming until I was out of breath—get out of the house you have no right to enter our neighbor's apartment the owner is not there and they didn't break the door open for you to barge in! Gilad Adin from Chanel 10 arrived in one of his perfect suits and his make-up was perfect too and in the midst of this madness he looked as if he'd spent an hour in a dressing room. He chose the most telegenic angles and the cameraman took some shots of him and the gawkers with wide-open eyes and the blood on the pavement.

Past eleven friends started coming. Reznitsky[8] came and helped Basin to remove three pieces of human flesh from one of the walls. Reznitsky has already died too.

The girls' friends came and brought some smokes, we were taking turns inhaling and were telling bad jokes and giggling inappropriately—it helped to relax a little. I kept finding nails everywhere and giving them to Basin, he could use some to hang his paintings back. He obediently accepted the nails and put them in a small box. Five days later when I found one more nail he looked at me sadly and then I realized where these nails came from and I became very scared.

Anya said she wanted ice cream. Basin said he wanted ice cream too and they went out to buy some. They were gone for some time and came back with four melting cones. This moron policeman, Anya said, would not let us back in and I called him an idiot and a brainless gorilla and now I feel bad I should go back and find him and apologize but how can I find him they all look the same in their gear and uniforms. Anya was going on and on. And Danilka was not saying anything.

Then we all went to bed. It was very cold and the girls slept together.

I woke up early, made myself a cup of coffee, lit a cigarette and stepped onto the balcony, forgetting they had told us it was not safe. (Four months later, when pieces of concrete started falling on pedestrians' heads, they finally fixed it.) I could not believe my eyes. They brought out tables from Café Atara across the street and set them up in the middle of the road. The cafe is not there any longer. All the tables were taken, the well-dressed people at the tables were reading the newspapers, and the newspapers had red color splashed across the pages, it was supposed to mean blood and the whole thing was supposed to mean that "life goes on" and I thought it looked like all of them were participants in a surreal play. Gilad Adin was back and his suit and tie were even more perfect than the day before. He was "covering the situation" for the evening news. His assistant was shoving the camera into people's faces but they did not mind—it's not every day that you can see yourself in the news. Basin was still in bed, lying in his favorite pose and watching it on TV. Gendelev called and said he saw me on the news and that he liked my red house dress but that my face looked swollen. He must had been watching a different channel.

Later in the day Volodya Voronel called from Tel Aviv to ask if I was OK. I said yes cheerfully but he said you don't understand your photo is on the front page of Yedioth Ahronoth,

and by the way you look great. Basin went out and bought the newspaper. Everybody complimented the photo. I realized that in a play about a terrorist attack everybody is assigned a role, and this was mine. Then mere acquaintances started calling to ask how we were doing. Some of them sounded almost envious—just think of it, to be at the epicenter of a suicide bombing and come out unscathed. We felt nauseous. Sasha Cantor came. He prescribed something homeopathic and the nausea stopped after three days.

The nausea reminded me of an episode 10 years ago. A close friend came from France to visit. The Intifada was in full swing and we usually did not go to the Old City, not because we were afraid, we just thought it was fair: they didn't want to see us and we didn't want to see them. But she insisted and we took her to see the bazaar near the Arab Quarter. When she was bargaining over some typical tchotchkes, a sense of danger suddenly filled the air over the bazaar and the shops started to close. The Arab shop owner was anxious to lock the doors and seemed to be willing to give away his goods, but my friend remained oblivious to the commotion. And then I saw that other Arab. He was walking up the stairs away from the Arab Quarter, towards us. His face was distorted in pain and fear and he was pressing his hands over his stomach trying to stop his guts from falling out. I explained to my friend that he must be an assassinated collaborator, nothing to stare at, let's-go-we-have-seen-enough. But she kept looking back in excitement—it was something to tell about back home and "it was not even dangerous."

We were still suffering from nausea when they began the repairs in the apartment. Mikhael the contractor was in his element, bossing around his workers who were all Arabs, what else. They did not hurry, fixing one crack in a wall a day and telling us that we would all be living in peace if it were not for our leaders, they are all the same, Arafat and Netanyahu, they both are shits. I did not say anything, just kept making them coffee and bringing falafels.

The repairs were not progressing and turned into another nightmare. Mikhael practically lived in our apartment. One day he brought his brother Koby, who thankfully installed a new door and windows. Mikhael's wife, children and friends would come to visit. We felt exhausted. One month later we asked Mikhael not to come back. He was terribly offended, said we were like family to him and one doesn't treat family like that. I yelled back at him that in all this time he at least could have cleaned the blood off the windowsill. I called his brother Koby for help. Koby said he was not responsible for his brother who does not know a thing about house repairs and just ruins his, Koby's, reputation and he would come do it himself.

In a month and a half the apartment became habitable. We had already paid for the repairs, which added thirty thousand shekels to our debt. As we were instructed by the assessor, we paid for the repairs out of pocket and the department of property tax was supposed to reimburse us in a month or so. But the department acted as if we did not exist. It turned out that they were underpaid and went on strike. We received our money just before Christmas.

Ten days after the explosion Anya went to stay with some friends in New York. She called me periodically and sobbed, she was having nightmares. I was having nightmares too and often screamed in my sleep and Basin would wake me up and not let me see the dream to the end. Danilka said she did not have nightmares.

For a long time Basin and Gendelev were trying to convince me, looking me straight in the eye, that there was no leg in a small black shoe, that I just imagined that shoe like I imagined a penguin in the Rest and Culture Park in Moscow where I went with my mother as a child and we were sitting on a bench and I was looking at the penguin and the penguin was looking at me and nobody can convince me that there were no penguins in the Rest and Culture Park. Finally they took pity and stopped torturing me and admitted that there was a leg and a small black shoe and no other leg.

Then an old friend of mine, Lyosha Prigozhin, came to visit. He always shows up when there is a disaster, not counting the 20 years after I left for Israel in 1970 and he was still living in Moscow. His coming was very comforting, we were sitting in the small room in our apartment, he was talking in his soft and tender voice and for a short time I forgot about everything. Then Ezra came. He laughed loudly and said, can you imagine, I have a friend, she works in Café Atara across the street and she was in shock after the explosion and they took her to the hospital but she was okay and they sent her home and when she got home—Ezra laughed again—she was combing her hair and there in her hair she found a finger—can you imagine a human finger! I laughed back insincerely and felt as if pus was spilling out of my brain.

The spectacle was coming to an end. I was waiting for somebody to come out and announce, "Many thanks to all of you, you can go home now." But the authorities and all the rest of the world must have believed that we would figure it out by ourselves. Three months later the defaced entry of our apartment building was finally fixed and painted over. The contractor this time was called Igal and the painters were two different Arabs. They worked fast and did a good job and I made them Turkish coffee. It was all over, we survived the explosion and could continue with our life. I thought perhaps we could go on living just as it was before, but each time I looked at Danilka I knew that we couldn't.

Once in a while through the open windows of our apartment we hear the shouts of police. They are disabling yet another suspicious object, which usually turns out to be harmless. Our dog Kaia dashes like a bullet to the bedroom, climbs into our bed and stretches there like a human. It almost looks as if she is trying to pull the blanket over her head.

A year passed. Some people gathered in front of our apartment building. Somebody played sad music on a lute and they installed a memorial plaque. They tried to light the memorial candles but it was windy and the candles would not stay lit. ■

Sonia Melnikova-Raich is an author and translator of fiction and non-fiction from Russian; she lives in San Francisco.

Under the Covers

When Her Father Won't Let Her Go to College

by ESTHER AMINI

Every night, after house patrol, Pop marched into my room shouting, "Enough books!" and flicked off my lights before slamming the door. He thought that by turning off lights he was turning *me* off, ridding me of curiosity and saving me from what would become a home-wrecking narcotic: books.

But by age 13, I was already a pro at reading with my head tucked under the sheets. I'd reach for my flashlight, dive head-first under the covers, and read voraciously. Beneath layers of bedding, with labored breathing, I silently turned pages. My squinting eyes, acclimating to the circle of light on each page, devoured the words. Eventually I'd resurface for a deep inhale and then slide back down.

Books…their insidious voices threatened to corrupt his highly sheltered, one-and-only daughter. Pop hated bookcases jam-packed with words, thoughts, and opinions that had not first passed his inspection: He thought books immoral, overthrowing the law and order he had firmly established in our home.

In the 1960's, as high-school girls teased their mountainous hairdos and applied hair spray for hourly reinforcement, I was raking in A's. A's were my lifeline to the outside, a rope ladder growing thicker and longer, stretching out my bedroom window. Throughout my teens, I'd put myself to sleep imagining that ladder furiously swinging back and forth, ultimately flinging me to that forbidden land, college.

"We suffered anti-Semitism in Iran, escaped and immigrated to America, not to end up cursed with an American daughter," Pop ranted. "A daughter who wants to read and go to school!" I thought he was insane.

In Mashhad he had lived life trembling, looking over one shoulder, always in fear of being stoned, beaten or murdered. He and his underground Jewish community posed as Muslims and carefully juggled dual identities. In the safety of his basement, he learned Hebrew and studied Torah. Outdoors, in public squares alongside Muslim neighbors, he chanted from the Koran. The journey from Mashhad to Bombay to Shanghai to San Francisco and finally to New York, with wife and sons, had been tremendously difficult. Endured so as to raise his children openly and freely as Jews—not Americans.

"America is a wild country! There is too much freedom! Just look at the nasty, loose girls walking the streets," he would shout in Farsi. "They all take drugs, wear short skirts, wanting you to look up and see everything when they cross their legs. American girls are *jen-dehs*—whores! It is my responsibility as your father to protect you from Americans and not allow you to *become* one."

In 1947, when Pop settled in New York City with my mother and my two brothers, he lugged with him not only rugs, pots, pans, mattresses, but all of Mashhad's thinking. A few years later, I was born—their first daughter and American child. Although my parents were delighted, my father was now saddled with the anxiety-ridden mission of keeping me uncontaminated.

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Mom and Pop both found my immersion in school heretical. In Mashhad, Jewish girls stayed home, learning to prepare for wifedom; the academic world belonged to men.

"American women, as a result of education, have become men. It is perverse," my father told me. "They squeeze themselves into subway cars, carry attaché cases, smoke cigarettes, and sleep around, as if they were not women."

To make sure I didn't become one of those educated whores, Pop praised me when I sewed and snarled when I studied. He continually argued for me to drop out of high school and stay home, to learn to embroider tablecloths, hem skirts, and master the art of Persian cooking.

But I also grew up with two older brothers. When I was eight, the elder brother, Albert, was a senior at Brooklyn Tech High School. Into the early hours of the morning, he would measure, draw and right-angle, hunched over a makeshift drafting table. He had rulers of every shape, size and color. Thirty or 40

of them hung over his head, nailed to a cork board.

After dinner, I would follow him into his bedroom and watch. Homes, offices, museums, concert halls, stadiums, highways, bridges…they all burst out from cryptic penciled lines. His dream was to become an architect and sculpt space in a way never done before.

Pop didn't think architecture was a real profession. He wanted to see Albert become a Persian rug dealer—now *that* had prestige. Mom, on the other hand, wanted educated sons. She would lick her lips and boast to her butcher, "My son vant be ar-ki-tect," not quite knowing what that meant, but enjoying the sound of hard consonants.

Mom had never been schooled. Each evening after dinner, she would scurry up the stairs with three bowls of fruit, each containing an apple, an orange, a banana, and a fruit knife carefully placed. To my brothers, the fruit praised and prophesized: "Keep studying, my brilliant sons. You will conquer the world." To me, the fruit said, "Eat and go to sleep."

At 18, Albert was awarded a full scholarship to Cornell's School of Architecture. With shoulders thrown back and blueprints in hand, he left for Ithaca. I cried for months.

When I was 11, my second brother, David, was accepted to Columbia University. English literature was his passion. His bedroom was stacked with books: novels, plays, and poetry. His love affairs were with Gerard Manley Hopkins, Thoreau, Eugene O'Neill, Henry James, Mark Twain, Joyce, and Wordsworth. There was no hint of Iran and our family's Persian legacy.

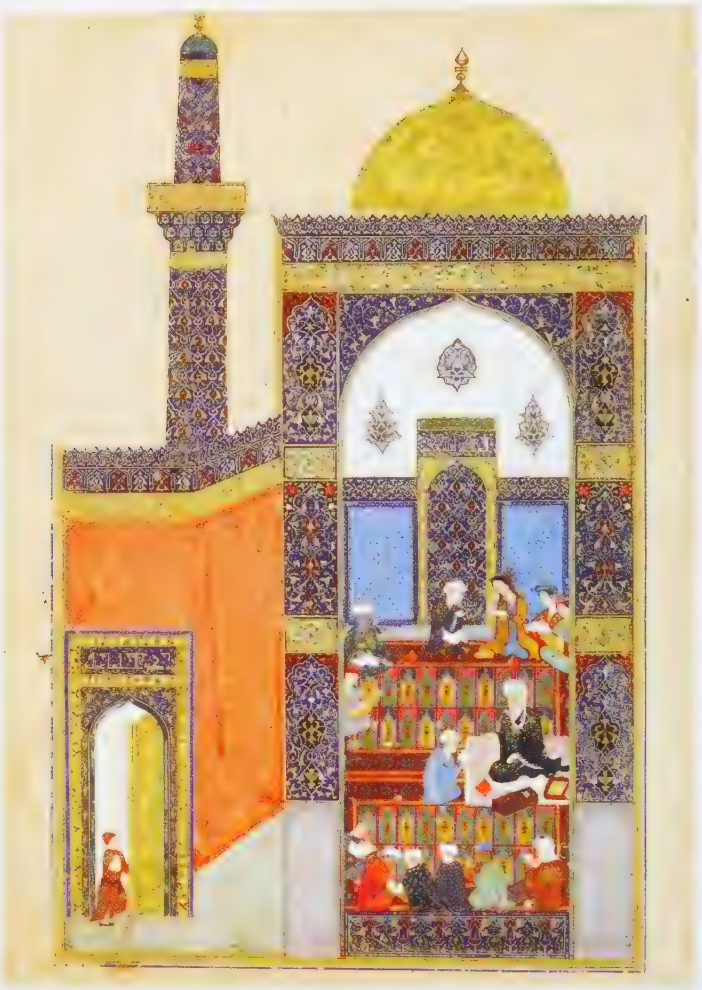
We would take long, hand-in-hand walks. "Writers," David would tell me, "were the greatest psychoanalysts, delving into the mysteries of God, love, hate, birth, and death." His mind stretched mine, taking me far beyond anything I was learning in middle school.

As for me, I had started forging Pop's name, Fatulla Amini, on every report card beginning with first grade. As I traveled through elementary and junior high school, Fatulla's signature improved. It wasn't until I reached 11th grade that my father demanded to see my report card. My stomach cramped as he slowly read my grades out loud: A after A. He cursed the day he had stepped foot in America. It was as though he'd discovered I was a drug addict and my A's were discarded heroin needles. His eyes bulging, pulling at his thick white hair, he said he would never allow his only daughter to reach her intended destiny, America's brothel: college.

Secretly, I sent college applications out to Radcliffe, Barnard, Brandeis, and Hunter. Although I had mastered forging Pop's name, I couldn't pay for four years of college. What was I thinking?

David became my accomplice. He was certain he could smuggle me out of Forest Hills and, behind our parents' backs, drive me to Massachusetts for my Radcliffe and Brandeis interviews, both scheduled for the same Friday. We hatched a plan to slip out of the house at 4:30 a.m., accomplish our mission, and return home before the Sabbath.

That Thursday evening, I set out my navy-blue plaid skirt and a starched white shirt. I lined up my polished, black penny-loafers, and prepared everything else: col-



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Pop swore, in Farsi, that he'd never allow a daughter of his to enter America's brothel: college.

lege forms, maps, driving directions, two cream-cheese sandwiches, and two cans of apple juice. Weeks in advance, I'd practiced washing my face and brushing my teeth noiselessly. David and I had agreed we wouldn't flush the toilet, in case the noise woke Pop: my father's ears were always on high alert. Since he lived with the perpetual fear that someone would break into our home, he slept, as he put it, "with one eye open."

At 4:30 a.m., my brother and I tiptoed down the long mahogany staircase, our shoes in hand. David had written a polite note telling our parents that we were taking a car trip. There was no reason to worry, he wrote—we'd be home in time for Shabbat dinner. He placed the note on the kitchen table. The note made us seem so conscientious and obedient, so respectful; I was sure my parents would suspect nothing.

We soundlessly opened and closed the kitchen's back door and entered the garage through its side door. David slipped into the driver's seat of our family's red Valiant. The one thing we couldn't control was the garage door—its rusty chains screeched when it was lifted.

With perfect synchrony, David turned the car key, the engine groaned, I raised the rickety door, which rattled and screeched on cue, and I jumped into the car, cursing the door. The car in reverse, David slammed on the gas.

Suddenly, Pop's crazed face flashed in front of the windshield. Barefoot, wearing grey flannel pajamas, his thick white hair spiked from pulling, he flailed his hands, desperate to cut off our escape.

Too late. We sped off towards Massachusetts. ■

Esther Amini is a writer and psychoanalytic psychotherapist. Her stories have appeared in Elle, The Jewish Week, Barnard Magazine, Tablet, and elsewhere. Two of her works were recently staged in "Saffron and Rosewater," a show at the 92nd Street Y; other pieces are currently being performed by the Jewish Women's Theatre in Los Angeles.

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CHANGE BECKONS

***Summer is the time when many of us find ourselves in nature**—at the beach, in the mountains, in the woods—and in these locales, we tend to liberate our thoughts, letting them roam balloon-like through landscapes portending change, enjoying them when they turn spiritual or introspective. The autumn season is not yet upon us, and yet... something beckons. Summer experiences prepare us—inadvertently, even unbidden—for the opportunity to change that we're presented with at the new year, Rosh Hashanah, that's just around the corner.*

***In the three pieces here, four women chart moments of deep personal change:** the somersaulting ironies that attend dating a religious Christian; the "sleeper" integration of religious experiences from childhood and late-middle age; and a* tashlich *for women that takes place in conversation—since that's where we are often most true.*

page 31 **HEAR, O ISRAEL:** How My Church-Going Boyfriend Made Me a Jew

page 34 **HINENI: HERE I AM:** Continuity After Conversion

page 36 **A WOMAN'S TASHLICH:** Walking Along the Water's Edge

***Tashlich is the ritual that invites us** to cast out into the waters aspects of the old year, of our old selves, liturgist Marcia Falk translates (from the Hebrew and Yiddish) important lyric foremothers—the poets Zelda, Leah Goldberg, and Malka Heifetz Tussman—as they use the medium of water (a sea, a river, a creek) to move along our thinking about the pressing questions of life. And she helps a friend align the posture of her heart for the new spiritual year.*

***In the months ahead, can we live less reactively in life's ebb and flow?** Can we learn to accept someone else's imperfect love? Can we acknowledge life's sadness? Can we trust? Can we live ourselves into wholeness?*

—SUSAN SCHNUR

HEAR, O ISRAEL

How My Church-Going Boyfriend Made Me a Jew

by DEBORAH L. BLICHER

I started attending synagogue out of revenge.

In the mid-1980s, while living in Texas, I abandoned a Ph.D. program. My research involved hours alone in the lab with a speech synthesizer, building and rebuilding single syllables. I hated it, but I resolved to finish my Masters project because I didn't know what else to do. During this period of waking every day with gritted teeth, I met Chris, a computer science undergraduate who hated his work, too. We fell in love, and I moved into the apartment above his.

Chris came from a long, documented line of devout Episcopalians. I'm Jewish. Fascinated by each other's religion, we enjoyed discussing our concepts of God. Chris's explanation of the Trinity went over my head, and he seemed to regard my "one God" upbringing as primitive, but we each liked being close to someone who, like ourselves, felt connection with a force we could sense but not see.

The chief conflict in our relationship was over time, not religion. I spent every spare minute on my research, and Chris's heavy course load wore him out. We had only Saturday nights together—or at least we did until Chris announced he planned to get up early for church in the morning and every Sunday thereafter. In fact, he said, he was thinking of teaching Sunday School.

We were lying on my bed, the Jewish futon of earthly pleasures. I'd lit the bedside oil lamp. I lifted my head off Chris's chest and asked, "Can't we talk about this?"

DETAIL FROM "IF YOU SIT LONG ENOUGH IN THE WOODS," OIL PASTEL, BY MARCIA FALK.

"About what?" His voice sounded to me like a viola played on the lowest string.

"You're making a unilateral decision," I said.

"You know there's only one thing more important to me than you, and that's serving God."

The idea of "serving" still didn't make sense to me: I'd been taught that people are partners with God. But I knew it made sense to Chris, so I said only, "Why now?"

"I'm not sure," he replied. "I just feel the need."

"Couldn't we figure out a way for you to have both me and God?" I asked. "We do have a conflict here." I sat up.

"We do?" He yawned.

"Saturday nights and Sunday mornings are our only times to make love."

"Maybe we stay in on Saturday mornings?" He yawned again, deeply. "You never go to synagogue on Saturdays. Look, I'm sorry, but I want to get out early tomorrow. Can we call it a night?"

"If you like."

He kissed me on the nose, blew out the oil lamp, and turned over.

I lay awake a long time. It surprised me that, although I had never attended Saturday morning services regularly, I resented Chris's assumption that I would give up the option. I felt anger, not for our dying sex life but for my lack of religious life. As Chris lay breathing beside me, I came to a decision: I'd start attending Shabbat services. If I countered his unilateral decision with one of my own, we'd have to compromise. Maybe we'd become more spiritually intimate, relieving the growing silence between us. Maybe I'd learn whether he wanted to be included in my future, and whether I wanted him there.

That week, I located a promising synagogue. I got up early Saturday morning, showered, and put on upgraded clothes. When I kissed Chris's cheek before leaving, he smiled in his sleep. I reflected that it didn't take much to make him happy. I thought myself unreasonable by comparison.

The single-story synagogue stood on a flat lot on a quiet street across from a creek. The flame-like sculpture of Hebrew letters over the front door spelled out the word *Sh'ma* ("Hear!"—the first word of Jews' foundational prayer: "Hear, O Israel: *Adonai* is our God, *Adonai* is One"). I thought this a good omen for a speech scientist. Waxy-leaved shrubs, past flowering, nodded against the brick walls. The building seemed humble compared to the synagogue of my childhood, which had a granite façade and floor-to-ceiling stained-glass windows. I'd been bullied there because I enjoyed my studies. This synagogue, in contrast, appeared a peaceful place for a bookish girl to learn Hebrew without being spit-balled.

The service was to begin in 10 minutes, but no other cars occupied the parking lot. Perhaps I'd heard the receptionist wrong when I called: perhaps there was no service. Or worse: perhaps the congregants didn't drive on Shabbat and were taking their time walking. Perhaps they would ostracize me for having driven. I tried both doors and sat down on the front steps. I wished I'd stayed home with Chris, or even gone to the lab.

Then I saw a man pushing a stroller down the sidewalk with a vigorous gait. When he saw me, he nodded and headed my way. A small boy walked beside him and a smaller boy rode in

the stroller. All three wore *kippot*. The man wore a neatly pressed suit and shoes as scuffed as a grade-school teacher's. He didn't look older than 30.

"Hi, I'm Marc Blumberg, the rabbi here," he said, extending his hand. "Who are you?" I heard no Texas accent—nor Oklahoma, Louisiana, Tennessee, or any of the other accents I'd come to know.

I gave him my name and wished him *gut shabbos*.

He introduced the boys, Jed and Aaron. Yes, there was a service today, he said, but people commonly arrived late; and yes, most people drove. He unlocked a side door and hoisted the stroller up the stairs. I followed him in.

Daylight from tall windows illuminated the sanctuary enough for me to make out the *bimah* and a portable lectern standing to one side. The rabbi lifted the younger boy out of the stroller and set him feet-first on the thick carpet, which absorbed all sound except for our voices. It reminded me of the soundproof booth in my lab, except the booth felt as confining as a coffin. The older boy climbed onto a high-backed chair against the back of the bimah and opened a picture book. The rabbi sat down on the bimah steps and I sat down, too.

"Where are you from?" he asked. "You talk like I do!"

I laughed and told him I'd grown up outside Boston.

He and his wife had come from Connecticut.

He asked whether I was single, and I told him no. He glanced at my unadorned ring finger and asked how serious the relationship was. I told him, "Very," but the question rang in my ears. Then he inquired after my Jewish history. I told him about the perfunctory quality of my family's observance, how we never talked about our spirituality even though we felt it. He said, "Your grandparents were the first generation born here, right?"

"As far as anyone knows. How did you—?"

"It's a common pattern of assimilation. Your family sounds like mine." Startled by this comparison, I expected him to tell me that joining his synagogue would be the best decision I could ever make. But he didn't. Before I could wonder why not, he stood up to prepare the sanctuary.

The rabbi flicked on light switches: the work of kindling fires on Shabbat is forbidden, but it is better to break a rule yourself than to force another to do so. The light brought paintings alive on the sanctuary walls. A dozen watercolors depicted elderly men at what looked like an Orthodox synagogue. In one painting, a gaunt man arranged silver goblets in a case while other men in magnificent *tallitot* prayed in a circle behind him. The painting focused on the gaunt man, who looked reverent, proprietary, and a bit tattered compared to the others. I thought, *My mother's family name is* Levinson: "son of the Levite." *The Levites were temple caretakers, like this man. He could be my great-great-grandfather.* I had never seen photos of my ancestors, nor known their names, nor which Eastern European villages they had fled. For a few moments, I regarded my history.

Congregants began to enter. I moved to an aisle seat halfway back. Elderly members labored down the aisle, and the rabbi stepped down from the bimah to assist them. Younger people came next, though none were by themselves like me. Some couples came with adult or teenage children who broke away from their parents and sat with one another. Then came couples with young children, the toddlers stepping proudly. All the babies reached for the rabbi. It seemed as though everyone belonged here, individual and matching, like notes on a musical scale.

Once everyone had been seated, the rabbi climbed the bimah steps, and conversation stilled. He produced a velvet bag from behind the lectern, and every adult—even the women, to my surprise—took out a bag, too. The rabbi drew out a bundle that unfolded into a *tallit* as long and wide as he was tall. Everyone else did the same, gold threads glinting against ivory backgrounds, fringes hanging from the corners. They kissed the top edge, then wrapped them around their bodies with a swift, swirling motion, covering their heads. I felt as though white cranes had suddenly alighted in sacred space. The rabbi began singing softly in a clear tenor with perfect diction, and everyone followed.

I didn't know the melodies, so I listened. The man next to me sang like my father's father, Marks Blicher, with a deep baritone, a slight Yiddish accent, and a wet quality that made it seem as though his throat needed clearing. The woman in front of me squawked with the nasal Brooklyn accent of the only great-aunt I'd ever met. The asthmatic wheeze of the baby in her arms resembled my brother's. Here in Texas, on a random Shabbat morning thousands of miles from home, I stood among a chorus of unclaimed kin.

That afternoon, I would tell Chris I needed to attend synagogue every week. He would support me, so the conversation I'd hoped for would not happen. Eight months later, we'd end what little remained of our romance. A month after that, my Masters thesis would be officially accepted, so I would pack up my apartment. I would cry all five hours of the flight back to Boston, missing Chris and fearing the unknown.

Now, in the sanctuary, surrounded by lost relatives, I heard whispers of this future. I lifted my voice in grief and praise. ■

Deborah L. Blicher is a Boston-area freelance writer and editor. Her essays have appeared in Calyx Journal and The Boston Globe, and she blogs about adoption at 2adopt.blogspot.com. Still obsessed with sound, she learns languages and instruments for fun.

DETAIL FROM "IF YOU SIT LONG ENOUGH IN THE WOODS," OIL PASTEL, BY MARCIA FALK.

HINENI: HERE I AM

Continuity After Conversion

by GAIL HOSKING

I am 11 years old, in a small stucco chapel on an American army base in southern Germany, attending a Wednesday night songfest of hymns. The pews are wooden, the carpet blue, and the low prayer stools meant for Catholic services are folded in. Because this is a military base that must include everyone stationed here, Jesus can be positioned so that he shows (for the Catholics) or is hidden (for the Protestants). Tonight he does not show.

Outside, it is the Cold War. 1961. A stone wall with barbed wire left over from Hitler's era circumvents the base, making this a lone outpost in the Alps. Inside, we are singing *The Old Rugged Cross*, and then *Oh, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing*, and then *Rock of Ages*. My music teacher at the Dependents' School leads us, playing the piano or sometimes the autoharp. From my seat a few rows from the front, I keep looking up to read the wall plaque that lists each hymn's page.

I'm not here because my parents insist that I come. No, I have walked here alone from our nearby apartment because I love the music, its passionate poetry, and the way that some people close their eyes and look upwards, as if communing with something *out there*, something I haven't discovered yet, but can sense in a corner of my heart, a tiny opening to the inexplicable; something that unseals my longing, for what, I don't know, but it is raw and tender, and expands my small universe in ways I already sense I will never be able to explain to anyone. I love the way the music buoys my life for a while so that my mother's loneliness in this foreign country and my father's long absences to prepare for the next war fade into background. I love the peace that fills me on these evenings.

At the end of the songfest, while everyone still stands talking before heading out into the snowy night, I see my friend Alma Elmore take her mother's hand, and I watch as the two of them prostrate themselves in front of the altar, their foreheads touching the carpet. Mrs. Elmore drapes her arm over her daughter's back and they lay there for the longest time, praying, I guess, perhaps crying. Their full skirts circle behind them like moments that I sense will travel with me, further and further, concentrically, along the trajectory of my life-to-be. No one in the chapel seems to think it's strange that Alma and her mother lie there, prone, unself-conscious. No one asks them to get up. No one asks if anything is wrong.

With one hand still on my hymnal and the other touching the back of a pew, I stare, embarrassed at first, but also moved by both their liberty and their humility. A tension of opposites holds me. On this army base of stiff uniforms and tattooed forearms, guns in bedroom closets and rucksacks always at the

DETAIL FROM "SABBATH," OIL PASTEL, BY MARCIA FALK

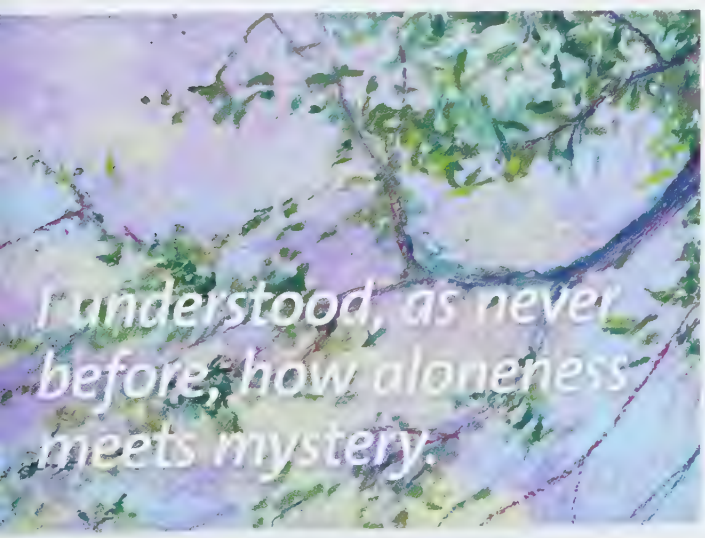
ready, I am not accustomed to seeing women stepping into their own, stepping into something publically private. Alma and Mrs. Elmore do not move for the longest time, and neither do I, transfixed by something both vulnerable and definitive.

Alma and I never speak of this, not in school and not at our Girl Scout meetings. Her family rotates back to the U.S. in the chess game the government plays with our lives. I will miss my shy, tall friend, the bent of her shoulders, her hair in sausage-like rolls—old-fashioned even then. I will mourn her for a while, but a new girl will come, and we will make room for her because this is what the children of soldiers do.

But this uncensored moment doesn't rotate or move, doesn't make room for another. This moment stays with me.

And now, decades later, as a converted Jew for the sake of marriage, I often live with that night, far away, in a tiny stitch of the Alps. I think I recognize what Alma's mother might have felt.

Sometimes, during the Jewish High Holy Days, when I listen to the cantor in her white robe chant the medieval *Hineni* prayer that translates as "Here I Am", a wave blows through me and unmasks my life. It opens my heart, though I hadn't known it was closed, I had no idea. It connects me for a brief moment to everything, to the nub of what it means to be alive, to terror, to joy. And when the cantor prostrates herself in front of the Torah, I feel how close I am to the portal of the unknown, a journey of faith. The stubborn hinges of my life burst open: *Here I am.*



After my 36-year marriage painfully ended, my heart burst like that. There was no getting away from the fragility that made me feel empathy for every suffering thing. I needed a ritual to help me; the signed papers were not enough. I needed time to be cleaved in two, like a child might need a parent's blessing before leaving home.

On a raw afternoon, I entered a mikveh, its simple structure adhering to ancient standards for ritual cleansing. In a room with a square four-meter pool of collected rain, uniform through the centuries, I stood naked as the moment of my birth before a mirror, repeating the Hineni prayer as I prepared myself for dunking. Hineni, I said. *Here I am.*

I was alone, proclaiming my presence, after my husband left me. Hineni. I was in a fractured universe with a song of sorrow on my tongue. Hineni. Without a plan, without a place to live, staring back at my wild eyes in the mirror, my middle-aged belly. I was as present in my life as was humanly possible. Suddenly, in the mirror, naked, the image of Alma and her mother leapt across the decades and cracked my heart wide with the force of humility. Prayers haloed out like ecstatic vibrations erasing *self*, inscribing open, porous impermanence.

I was back in that army chapel, Alma taking her mother's hand and the two of them prostrating themselves, reaching for me, keeping me company. I understood as never before how aloneness meets mystery. Bombs could drop, the Soviets could attack at any moment, we could all be killed; release was the only path to transformation, no matter what religion, what creed.

I walked down the tiled steps and lowered myself into the warm living waters, dunking under once, then praying, dunking again, then again, like some primordial creature dying and being reborn at the same time. *Let the waters take you*, the female rabbi had said. *Let the old float away, the new come towards you.* As she spoke, I began to experience the water itself as prayer. As hope.

No one in the chapel thinks it's strange that Alma and her mother lie there, prone, unself-conscious, I remembered. No one asks them to get up. No one asks if anything is wrong.

I felt alive.

Hineni.

Here I am. ■

Gail Hosking is the author of the memoir Snake's Daughter *and the poetry chapbook* The Tug. *Her essays and poetry have appeared in literary journals and anthologies. She teaches at Rochester Institute of Technology.*

A WOMAN'S TASHLICH:

Walking Along the Water's Edge with Liturgist Marcia Falk & Rabbi Susan Schnur

It's been 18 years since Marcia Falk, renowned Jewish-feminist scholar and poet, brought us her groundbreaking *The Book of Blessings: New Jewish Prayers for Daily Life, the Sabbath, and the New Moon Festival*, a prayer book that not only uncoupled liturgy from patriarchal themes and imagery, but that gave women—and continues to give women—contemplative, gender-corrective ways to connect to the sacred.

In Falk's new book, *The Days Between: Blessings, Poems, and Directions of the Heart for the Jewish High Holiday Season*, she takes us further down the same spiritual path, reminding us that it is good to experience "the turning of the Jewish year" in nature, and that it is holy to immerse ourselves mindfully in endings and beginnings, in solitude and in relationships. *"What kind of life will we live in the time we have?,"* Falk asks. *"Where in our life will we find purpose and meaning?"*

Falk underscores that the period between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (*Aseret Y'mey T'shuvah*) is intended to be a continuous devotional span; "ten days of meeting oneself face-to-face, opening the heart to change." The word "between" in the book's title palpates one of women's special strengths: connection. Alas, we humans cannot stop time—we can't make our six-year-old stay six forever, or bring a beloved deceased person back to life—but we can strive to be "fully aware of our connectedness to everything in our world," and in that way live ourselves into "wholeness, serenity, and fulfillment."

DETAIL FROM "LONG SHADOW," OIL PASTEL, BY MARCIA FALK.

I asked Marcia if she would take a walk with me, for *tashlich*, along a river's edge, using five poems from *The Days Between* as guideposts. (Tashlich is the ceremony in which Jews throw crumbs into the water to symbolize casting away our sins. In *The Days Between* Falk calls her new ritual *Nashlich*, which is gender-inclusive, "we will cast," rather than Tashlich, "You [God, masculine] will cast.") In the pages that follow here, she does this, helping me journey spiritually through her translations of poems by the well-known Hebrew poets Zelda and Leah Goldberg, and by the less well-known Yiddish poet Malka Heifetz Tussman. We begin our walk with Falk's own poem, which revisions Micah 7:19, the biblical verse that opens the traditional tashlich. As we recite and then discuss the poems, they become cast as a prayer cycle.*

Each of the poems, says Falk, "uses the archetypal symbol of water as revelatory, transformative, and redemptive." Each "explores time, change, and mortality in the context of intimate relationships; and in each, water is given a voice. Zelda's sea sings, Goldberg's river hums, Tussman's creek babbles."

Reader: Take a walk with us. Put some crumbs in your pocket for tashlich, and find a serene place alongside water…water that eddies or babbles, water that cascades or crashes, water that hardly ripples. Enter "the between," give voice to a conversation with your life, move forward along the meridian of deepening *t'shuvah*.

Hey, you! Come along, too.

CASTING AWAY

We cast into the depths of the sea
our sins, and failures, and regrets.

Reflections of our imperfect selves
flow away.

What can we bear,
with what can we bear to part?

We upturn the darkness,
bring what is buried to light.

What hurts still lodge,
what wounds have yet to heal?

We empty our hands,
release the remnants of shame,

let go fear and despair
that have dug their home in us.

Open hands,
opening heart—

The year flows out,
the year flows in.

—Marcia Falk

MARCIA FALK: The High Holiday language is full of power and terror, and the verse from Micah that we recite for the traditional tashlich ritual is vivid, almost violent, asking God to hurl all our sins into the depths of the sea. I have a different image of the new year, of life and change. A wave comes to shore and then pulls back, there's ebb and flow. Is it only our "sins" that we need to let go into the sea?

SUSAN SCHNUR: In the third stanza of *Casting Away*, you ask, "What can we bear?" Help me understand this.

FALK: For example, can I bear to live with the knowledge that I was mean to my child? Can I *accept* the "mean" parts of myself? Can I forgive myself?

SCHNUR: And then the poem asks, "With what can we bear to part?"

FALK: Yes. What can we let go of? I'm in the process of clearing out 20 years of clutter from my house, and I'm overwhelmed. I have to look at each thing: Can I part with this? Can I part with that? It can be hard to let go, to stop looking backwards. This is the time of year when we want to be able to walk into the new, but the old holds us hostage. Can we "release the remnants of shame," let go the despair that has "dug [its] home in us"? The holiday is about perfecting ourselves—but not everything can be changed. *Can we accept ourselves?*

SCHNUR: Okay, here's what I want to personally ponder in the palimpsest of this poem: *This year, can I live less reactively in life's ebb and flow?*

FACING THE SEA

When I set free
the golden fish,

the sea laughed
and held me close

to his open heart,
to his streaming heart.

Then we sang together,
he and I:

My soul will not die.
Can decay rule a living stream?

So he sang
of his clamoring soul

and I sang
of my soul in pain.

—Zelda

*I have distilled our conversation.

FALK: Now we come to "*Facing the Sea*," in which the speaker finds this Other—the sea—that is so unlike her. The speaker is quietly suffering, but the sea is noisy, laughing, bubbling over. Nature is completely alive, always alive—this noisy sea, embracing us, holding us close.

SCHNUR: "*My soul will not die*"—they sing together about their shared immortality, that dying never conquers life. But the speaker remains so alone. The "Other" can only comfort us up to a point. Is that right?

FALK: The speaker lets something go—"the golden fish," whatever that is—and she is embraced. Then the speaker and the sea sing together, but their voices are very different. This poem, for me, is about being in pain and trying to find comfort.

SCHNUR: Here's what I think I need to think about here: *Can I learn to accept someone else's imperfect love? Can I sing with the universe?*

THE BLADE OF GRASS SINGS TO THE RIVER

Even for the little ones like me,
one among the throng,
for the children of poverty
on disappointment's shore,
the river hums its song,
lovingly hums its song.

The sun's soft caress
touches it now and then.
My image, too, is reflected
in waters that flow green,
and in the river's depths
each one of us is deep.

My ever-deepening image
streaming away to the sea
is swallowed up, erased
on the edge of vanishing.
And with the river's voice,
with the river's psalm,
the speechless soul will sing
praises of the world.

—*Leah Goldberg*

FALK: This poem and the next are from a sequence by Leah Goldberg called "Poems of the River." In the first poem here, a tiny blade of grass sings to the river. We all feel, at some time in our lives, that we're "on disappointment's shore," that we are insignificant, "children of poverty"—a very touching phrase for me. But nature can comfort us—"the sun's soft caress." The river, in fact, takes our "images"—our faces, our selves—and deepens them.

When our mind quiets down, we get to sing "with the river's voice, with the river's psalm," and we finally feel ourselves part of everything. Water here is wholeness, vitality, moving, streaming away to the sea.

So many of us experience ourselves as small—"even for the little ones like me" is such a poignant image. Why does the little blade of grass want to assure us that the river hums for us, too, lovingly? The blade of grass itself becomes our comforter.

SCHNUR: I love the rushing compassion of this poem. I want to say, "Yes, yes. Don't leave without me!" This poem makes me want to think about the spiritual challenge of trust. *Can I trust that everything will be okay?*

THE TREE SINGS TO THE RIVER

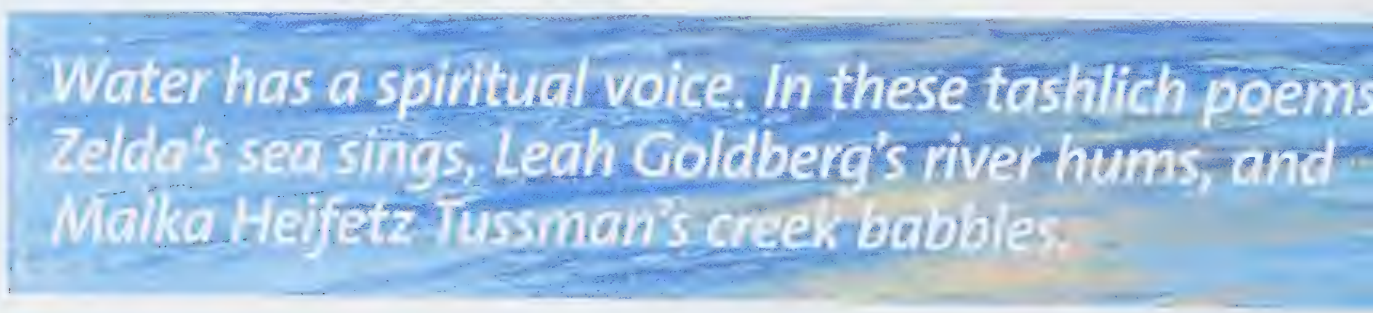
He who carried off my golden autumn,
who with the leaf-fall swept my blood away,
he who will see my spring return
to him, at the turning of the year—

my brother the river, forever lost,
new each day, and changed, and the same,
my brother the stream, between his two banks
streaming like me, between autumn and spring.

For I am the bud and I am the fruit,
I am my future and I am my past,
I am the solitary tree trunk,
and you—my time and my song.

—*Leah Goldberg*

FALK: Ah! Here we find a less quiet voice, the self-possessed voice of the tree describing its relationship to the river. We don't normally think of "blood" [in the second line] when we think of


Water has a spiritual voice. In these tashlich poems
Zelda's sea sings, Leah Goldberg's river hums, and
Malka Heifetz Tussman's creek babbles.

DETAIL FROM "PSALM FOR SABBATH EVE," OIL PASTEL, BY MARCIA FALK. *WWW.MARCIAFALK.COM*

trees; we associate that with animal life, and when the animal is drained of blood it dies. The image is shocking, even suggestive of domination and submission: the river carries away the tree's life-blood, yet the tree returns to the river again and again. Or, another way to look at it: perhaps the voice is defiant; it will not die, it will return, year after year.

There's movement, a shifting of perspective. In the second stanza, the tree and the river are kin: the river streams, like the tree, between seasons. But in the last stanza the tree lets the river know that he, the tree, is solitary, whole in himself: "I am the bud and I am the fruit, I am my future and I am my past."

Then, at the end, there's a powerful reversal. The tree no longer addresses the river in the third person—as "he," as "my brother"—but says, "you—my time and my song." We aren't solitary after all. There's always "the other," we exist *in time*, vis-à-vis the other. What is my voice if I'm just talking into the emptiness? I don't have a voice unless I'm speaking to you.

SCHNUR: This poem breaks my heart. The tree is learning how to move from Martin Buber's "I-It" relationship—separate, detached, full of defensive bravado—into an "I-Thou" relationship—of mutuality, of reciprocity, of touching interdependence. This challenge hits home for me: *Can I learn to be more empathic and more yielding in my relationships?*

FALK: This last poem is a little touch of *mameloshn* [Yiddish] in the middle of my book. Once again, water gives us its wisdom. The speaker talks to a stream, sweetly, as though to a child: "Little stream, tell me. Will you be here forever?" Human beings want to know! Are we going to live or die? What's coming next?

And the creek laughs: Why are you asking such a question? This is what there is! "Today is forever." The poor creek to have such a foolish disciple!

SCHNUR: Yes, how can we humans think about ourselves without thinking about the fact that we will die?

FALK: In every nature poem, there's a dark thread. I like this poignancy; so much of Jewish liturgy doesn't acknowledge it. I'm talking about sadness. There's awe, fear, trembling, God is big, we're small, all of that. The Kaddish: we exalt You, we enlarge Your name. How does that help one feel better? You're sorrowing, you're grieving, and what does the liturgy give you back? A big silence. Not much comfort. These poems by Jewish women offer us more.

SCHNUR: This poem asks the biggest question perhaps. Here go my last breadcrumbs into the water. *How can we acknowledge life's sadness? Can we do so and smile?* ■

FROM TODAY IS FOREVER

I stroll often in a nearby park—
old trees wildly overgrown,
bushes and flowers blooming all four seasons,
a creek babbling childishly over pebbles,
a small bridge with rough-hewn railings—
this is my little park.

It's mild and gentle
in the breath-song of the park
and good to catch some gossip
from the flutterers and fliers.

Leaning on the railing of the bridge,
seeing myself in clear water,
I ask, *Little stream,*
will you tumble and flow here
forever?

The creek babbles back, laughing,
Today is forever:
Forever is right now.

I smile, a sparkful of believing,
a sighful of not-believing:
Today is forever.
Forever is right now...

—Malka Heifetz Tussman

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REVIEWS

Behaviors from Generation to Generation

Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizek famously criticized the way fat-free chocolate and decaf coffee have allowed us to rid ourselves of our guilt in today's consumerist culture. Israeli author **Orly Castel-Bloom** extends this dystopian vision in her new novel *Textile* (The Feminist Press, $18.95; translation by Dalya Bilu), where housing developments are built with no ecosystem, homes are established in brand-new apartments with no past, family members try to forget their ties to each other, and even the body undoes the effects of time.

Castel-Bloom weaves together a multivalent and sprawling text, set mostly in a lavish but hygienic Tel Aviv suburb and the isolation of upstate New York. The narrative focuses on a wealthy suburban family of four, who revolve around each other without real intimacy or responsibility.

At the heart is Mandy, Amanda Gruber, a judgmental mother figure absorbed in her own efforts to look younger and anesthetize herself while her son serves as a sniper in the Israeli army. Meanwhile, her genius husband, a somewhat famous scientist in Israel, is absorbed in efforts to invent a special suit to protect the body from terrorism. The outlier, and inheritor of the family pajama factory, is young Lirit, who just broke up with her boyfriend and is beginning to fill her mother's shoes.

With a keen eye for class and gender politics, *Textile* moves from one character to another and still feels like a quick read. The author often takes us back three generations to trace the way languages and behaviors get passed down *l'dor v'dor*, from generation to generation. The text itself is multi-lingual, with bits of French and even Yiddish thrown in, and always in transition, reflective of the "third millennium" of history and critical of it. Everyone is an exile in some sense, trying on new tongues and wardrobes, trying to adapt to a new environment.

Not only is the book international but it also feels slightly futuristic, in the way that the lifestyles of the elite always seem somehow at the cutting edge of civilization and closer to its end. The only control group in the experiment is Mandy's inherited business, the Nighty-Night pajama factory, which serves the ultra-Orthodox community and stays unchanged, according to her mother's dying wish.

Though the opening inscription from Leviticus warns us of the law of *Shatnez*, not to wear a garment of cloth made of two kinds of material, *Textile* explores what happens when worlds are forced to collide, how we try to protect ourselves and our bodies from life.

"History is a load. A burden," an Israeli-expat masseuse tells the famous Israeli scientist on his first night in Ithaca, New York. And yet, "It's no good being the first in a certain place. It gives rise to anxiety," the scientist declares later in the middle of a nervous breakdown.

Caught in contradiction and paradox, dissatisfied and desperate for happiness, and painfully incapable of communicating with each other, these characters shop or work or read or get plastic surgery instead. Underneath it are relentless pangs of guilt and shame and past trauma, triggered by layers of the very history and relationships they can't bear.

Though Castel-Bloom, author also of *Human Parts* and *Dolly City*, has something of a reputation in Israel for daring and macabre themes, this book is both readable and relatable, a testament too to Bilu's seamless translation. *Textile* is a sharp and engaging study of individual psychologies in an age of anxiety and consumerism, and Castel-Bloom is a masterful storyteller for these interesting times.

MARINA BLITSHTEYN *is a writer and poet living in Brooklyn. Her chapbook* Russian for Lovers *was published by Argos Books in 2011.*

Great (Jewish, Feminist) American Poetry

Four new collections of poetry by **Ellen Bass**, **Robin Becker**, **Alicia Ostriker**, and **Maxine Kumin** demonstrate how powerful Jewish feminism is in the consciousness of American poetry.

Ellen Bass, co-editor of the groundbreaking anthology of women's poetry *No More Masks!* and self-help best-seller *The Courage to Heal*, reminds us of the vast universe that poets create from small, sharply-observed moments. In her third collection, ***Like a Beggar***, Bass builds the epic from the ordinary and celebrates the ordinary as exceptional. Filled with odes and lyrical, prayer-like meditations, *Like a Beggar* "love[s] the truth." In the first poem "Relax," Bass warned, "Bad things are going to happen;" and they do, in this book, in life, but Bass renders them livable and beautiful. After gruesome details describing the killing of a chicken, Bass reminds us, "looking straight at the terrible," of the "one-sided accord we make with the living of this world." *Like a Beggar* is an exuberant celebration of living in the world.

Couplets, tercets, and quatrains order the pages of **Robin Becker**'s eighth collection ***Tiger Heron***, but the emotions they contain are unruly. In one beautiful poem about her mother, "A Last Go," Becker confides, "Now that medical studies show/ the skinny live longer, she's gained/the sweet taste of being right all along." Still, Becker encourages her to "try the ginger scones, / the lemon poppy seed cake," noting, "there's time for a last / go at pleasure." Grief and loss punctuate pleasure in *Tiger Heron*, but through this dizzying emotion-

al landscape, Becker's technical prowess dazzles. In "The Sounds of Yiddish," she moves seamlessly between lighthearted bromides, like "when a schlimazel sells an umbrella the sun comes up," to grim reflections on her Bubbe leaving a shtetl with the Yiddish aphorism "Spare us what we can learn to endure."

Alicia Ostriker creates a new cosmology in ***The Old Woman, the Tulip, and the Dog***, interrogating what makes the world operate for the salty old woman, the comely tulip, and the flippant dog. A sequence of persona poems, often ending with a joke, this collection differs from Ostriker's previous work, which featured her strong confessional voice and lyrical narratives. In *The Old Woman, the Tulip, and the Dog*, Ostriker summons William Blake as an intellectual companion, infusing his voice with her Jewish, feminist sensibility. For example, in "The Wind That Blows Through Me," the old woman posits that God is inside her hand when she writes, while the tulip says she feels "the presence / of the goddess inside me." The dog rejects theology as "bunk" but while running in the park affirms "the springtime wind is real." *The Old Woman, the Tulip, and the Dog* is a joyous, accessible engagement.

Maxine Kumin finalized ***And Short the Season*** just before her death, at age 88, in February 2014. The collection confirms her formidable poetic talents as well as the wide range of ideas that occupied her as a poet and public intellectual. Reprinting "The Revisionist Dream," Kumin gestures to her storied friendship with Anne Sexton; she grapples with reports of torture at Guantánamo Bay and celebrates the natural world. In "Purim and the Beetles of Our Lady," Kumin considers beetles that "emerge in a moment of melt / to slip into our homes through crevices too slight / for a whisper." In spite of her delight with nature, Kumin confides that these beetles "eat holes in my love for this earth." While Kumin's love of nature may be frayed, it is persistent—and visionary. In *And Short the Season*, Kumin explores catastrophic climate change, explaining its effects in "Going Down:" "they call it climigration, these / experts in vast shoreline loss / and islands swept by rising seas." She also warns of losses, commanding "Blow a kiss to this drowned world."

What makes the world operate for the salty old woman, the comely tulip and the flippant dog.

Most spectacular in this collection is Kumin's series "Sonnets Uncorseted." Ten linked sonnets meditate on seventeenth-century poet Margaret Cavendish and the progress women made in poetry during Kumin's lifetime. This triumphant narrative lessens the pain readers feel from

Kumin's loss. In "Allow Me," she portends her own death, imploring a godlike reader to make it "sudden and quiet, surrounded by friends." She then recognizes "But who gets to choose this ordered end / Trim and untattered, loved ones at hand?" Kumin's life may have come to an end, but at least we can keep her books at hand.

JULIE R. ENSZER *is a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of Women's Studies at the University of Maryland. She is the author of* Sisterhood *and* Handmade Love, *and editor of* Milk & Honey: A Celebration of Jewish Lesbian Poetry.

From Russia, with Narrative

I read ***Panic in a Suitcase***, the debut novel by **Yelena Akhtiorskaya**, by the ocean. At Brighton Beach, in fact—the fertile backdrop for this chaotic family saga. Reading the story on the shores of the Atlantic, it was easy to imagine the sundry oddball siblings stalking across the streets and into the bodegas and bakeries of Brooklyn's "little Odessa by the sea."

The remarkable corporeality of this vision emerges thanks to the surprising and vivid detail in Akhtiorskaya's writing. In this novel of hectic depths, a Russian Jewish family of dissatisfied misfits emigrates from Ukraine to Brooklyn. The characters are characters indeed, trying to make a home for themselves on Coney Island Avenue, "a street where cars had many lanes but still bunched together and

CAN'T WE TALK ABOUT SOMETHING MORE PLEASANT?

Calling **Roz Chast**'s new book a tear-jerker would be silly.

The graphic memoir will evoke noises from you that a normal crying person would not make: low moans, ragged breathing.

It took me a second to realize that the Sounds of Grief were coming out of me—*I* was the person enjoying this fantastically quick-witted, sweet, insanely and perceptively funny new book by her favorite cartoonist. But they were.

Roz Chast's cartoons have been an (the?) off-the-wall mainstay of The New Yorker for decades. They feature nervously drawn, quavering people, stupidly smiling horses, and inanimate objects with delightful expressions on their faces. They are often set in living rooms and sometimes include a lumpy couch, an armchair, wallpaper, and a really stupid painting of boats on the wall.

On the cover of this book, the author sits with her two aged parents on a lumpy couch that is familiar to us from her cartoons. The argyle-patterned wallpaper is of a deathly hue: dark purple on black. All three of them look deeply uncomfortable.

The title, "***Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?***" is what Chast's parents would say to her whenever she tried to talk to them about "end of life plans."

George and Elizabeth Chast were born in 1912, 10 days apart. They grew up two blocks from each other in East Harlem, and were in the same fifth grade class. Elizabeth had been an assistant principal, domineering and "built like a peasant," who referred to her terrible temper, chillariously, as "a blast from Chast." George was a high school teacher. He was slight, kind, an explorer of word origins, a careful chewer of food, and suspiciously inept when it came to using toasters and other gadgets.

He loved bananas; she hated bananas. They argued often about fruit and other things. But they referred to each other—this was both sweet and a little horrifying—as soul mates. They did everything together.

In one of the first pages in the book we read the story of how, one day in 1940, a light bulb burned out in their apartment. George had a phobia of light bulbs and also of step stools, so Elizabeth stood on the stool and replaced the bulb. She was six and a half months pregnant. Soon after that, the pregnancy developed terrible complications, and she gave birth, prematurely, to a "perfectly formed, but blue" baby who died one day after it was born. The complications had nothing to do with the changing of the light bulb, but still the connection between baby death and changing light bulbs became an unspoken part of family lore. The story does not come up again, but it sets the tone of the book, which is a tragedy told in anecdotes.

Baby Roz came along 14 years after that first baby. An only child, she always felt like an intruder in her parents' "tight little unit." In the family photographs included in this book, she is not smiling.

In 2001, after avoiding Brooklyn for 10 years, she has a sudden, intense urge to visit her parents, who are nearing 90, in their old home.

The first thing she notices is that everything in the apartment is coated in grime. Her parents are frailer than she thought, and less able to manage. Uneasily, she wonders: what next.

Two days later, the twin towers fall.

Her parents quickly go back to arguing about bananas. But their decline is underway.

In a series of keen, lucid observations of tiny, insane details, Chast describes her father's senile dementia and her mother's harrowing digestive ailments, the weirdly cheerful "Place" she convinces them to go live in (she hangs decorative corn cobs on their door, because "when in Rome"), their fear and crankiness, the responsibilities that land on her, the chilling truths about "stuff" known only to people who have had to clean out their parents' houses. This is the story of George and Elizabeth's drawn-out, confusing, stressful, sad, expensive deaths.

tiny people on the tiny strips of sidewalk seemed to be crossing a desert."

In the Nasmertov family, every generation is unsettled in its own way. There's the linchpin, the distracted Pasha—a spacey poet of indeterminate success who can't decide whether to remain in Ukraine or finally join his family in Brooklyn. His sister Marina, who is fired from her job cleaning houses when she gives pepperoni pizza to the son of her Orthodox employers. Pasha's father (who had no temper to lose) and mother ("Prisoners in labor camps hadn't exerted themselves at an equivalent level of intensity for such hopeless durations"). And his niece Frida—poor Frida: "Impressive applied to Frida meant that she wear a dress and sit at the table. No one expected smiles, precocious conversation, grace." The Nasmertovs are never quite at home in Russian-speaking Brooklyn, yet are far removed from their family and friends in Ukraine, and perhaps farthest of all from the Manhattan right above them.

In the Nasmertov family, every generation is unsettled in its own way.

In ***Lena Finkle's Magic Barrel***, a gorgeous graphic novel by the celebrated artist

The narrative is modular. Each page could easily stand on its own as a full-page cartoon—the type Chast publishes, when we are lucky, in The New Yorker. Each page, on its own, is completely funny—funnier than sad.

How does Chast string together the "minutia" of cartoons and anecdotes and old photographs? Did she put a lot of work into switching from "cartoonist'" to "graphic novelist?" Did she change her voice to accommodate the seriousness of the subject matter?

If she did wrench this story out of herself—if she did strain herself to make a million tiny and difficult adjustments to her craft—we can't tell. The story flows so easily. The large-scale tragedy grows out of the surprising and human details as naturally as it does in Shakespeare. When you read Romeo and Juliet, you don't say: wow, how does he focus simultaneously on the big and the small, the sad and the funny? Somehow, deceptively, while you are reading, everything is obvious to you: the story could not have been told any other way, and it is the only story that could have been told. Roz Chast makes telling the sad truth in funny pictures seem effortless—makes it seem obvious.

LIANA FINCK *is a comics artist and cartoonist. Her first graphic novel is "A Bintel Brief."*

I made sure their door always had decor.
There's a little hook on the back! See?
Indian corn, flowers. Things like that.
It's very lovely.
What is that called, again?
No wreaths. One has limits.
Door decor was not an important part of my parents' old lives.
Why would anyone want to call attention to their door?!?
Besides, it's a waste of money.
But when in Rome...
I didn't want other residents to think they were weird or anti-door decor.
I heard the Chasts are from New York.
Mmm-hmm.

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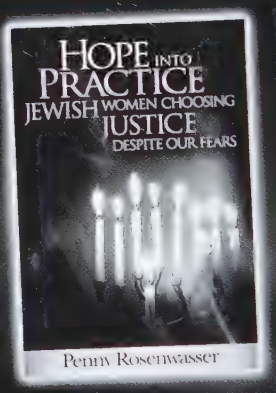


Anchored in Jewish ethical tradition, community, and an activist's call to repair the world.

HOPE INTO PRACTICE
JEWISH WOMEN CHOOSING JUSTICE DESPITE OUR FEARS
by Penny Rosenwasser

Penny's book is filled with wild, truthful and exuberant voices, you can feel their spirits in their words. –Rabbi Margaret Holub

Order from AK Press or Amazon, info at PennyRosenwasser.com

and author *Anya Ulinich*, the path from Russia to New York (and back, and forth) fades a bit more into the background of the winding story. Here we have one central protagonist—a warm, smart, wounded woman who emerges from years of cold or abusive relationships with two children and a lifetime's worth of sexual confusion.

She embarks on a quest to find love (or is that sexual fulfillment? intimacy? stability?) while juggling single parenthood and a precarious yet successful enough career as a novelist. "I became a tourist in the country of men," she writes, "or at least in the New York metropolitan area of men. I was like people who, when they felt like a road trip, shut their eyes, pointed to a random spot on a map, and drove…"

Lena's insecurities and narcissism are deeply sympathetic. She berates herself—"What is it with you immigrants? Why are you so afraid of yourselves? … For all your proclaimed affection for Dostoevsky, you're an excellent immigrant child, Finkle, a.k.a. a smart drone!" Lena traces her life in relationships, marks time by counting men, and avoids her work by browsing on OkCupid.

The imperfect, floundering characters in these two novels are deeply relatable. They leave you with the distinct impression that each person, each family, is no more or less unhinged and absurd than any other. In the midst of these distinctive migrations, it is the emotional familiarity of these characters that makes each one so compelling.

SONIA ISARD *is a contributing editor at Lilith Magazine. She is a graduate of the University of Michigan and the Jewish Theological Seminary, where she studied Russian Jewish history and literature.*

RELIGION AND GENDER IN THE ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES

When twenty-five-year-old Shani Boianjiu served as an infantry instructor in the Israel Defense Forces, her job occasionally involved having to touch other soldiers—teaching her students how to hold a gun correctly, how to lie on the ground in position, or how to protect themselves from enemy attack. Although this was an acceptable part of the job and made her an excellent instructor, it also caused problems for certain soldiers, specifically religious ones.

In an essay in the New York Times in September 2012, Boianjiu described the first time this happened. She was teaching a soldier to sit correctly in the field. "I came up behind him and put both hands on his shoulders, gently shaking him. I wanted to explain, 'Look how easy it is for me to shake you out of position,' but I couldn't, because the soldier was yelling at me like he was on fire. I couldn't make out what he was saying, but he was still in training and I was shocked by his disobedience. I thought maybe he was confused, so I bent down in the sand and grabbed his foot, moving it so that his toes pointed forward. If anything, he screamed louder. It was only when the drill ended that I caught what he was saying: 'I observe touch.' What this meant was that he couldn't touch or be touched by girls or women. I was his superior and trainer, but I was also a girl."

Female soldiers have made tremendous strides in the IDF over the past two decades. According to the IDF spokesperson's office, women make up 33 percent of the IDF, female officers with the rank of colonel doubled from 2 percent in 1999 to 4 percent today, and the percentage of female officers with the rank of lieutenant colonel has grown by 70 percent in the last decade, from 7.3 percent in 1999 to 12.5 percent today. Moreover, over half of all soldiers in officer courses are women. During the last three years, an average of 55 percent of all staff officers in the Officers' Training Course were women, an average of 53 percent of those OTC graduates went on to become officers in combat support positions, and an average of 3 percent of all combat officers were women. Perhaps most significantly, in March 2011, the IDF appointed Brigadier General Orna Barbivai as the first-ever female major general.

From the statistics, it's clear that women are still a small minority of officers, but their numbers are rising. But as a country with mandatory conscription since its founding in 1948—the only country in the world in which women are also subject to this conscription—these advances for women are significant. Gone are the days when women in the army are relegated to jobs of making coffee and typing men's memos. Also, even though, according to the IDF, some women only serve in 69 percent of the 93 percent of all roles that are open to them, they are present in far more areas of the Israeli military than ever before.

But as Shani Boianjiu's example shows, women's advances are also potentially problematic for religious men. And this could signal the beginning of a troubling trend for women in the army.

ELANA MARYLES SZTOKMAN

Reprinted with permission from The War on Women in Israel: How Religious Radicalism is Smothering the Voice of a Nation *(Sourcebooks, 2014).*

Jewish Genetic Lessons

The basics of pre-implantation genetic diagnosis, hereditary breast and ovarian cancer, and inflammatory bowel disease are some of the topics of a series of web lessons that address the question, what do these conditions and technologies mean for me because I am Jewish? Many of the lessons have an associated short public service announcement as well as a longer webinar presentation, supplemental reading materials and links to resources and support organizations. This site is an initiative of the Program for Jewish Genetic Health of Yeshiva University and the Einstein College of Medicine. *MyJewishGeneticHealth.com*

Find Out if You're a Carrier

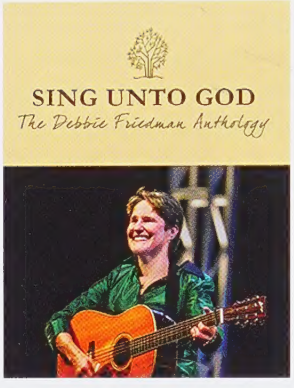
Screening for genetic diseases commonly found among Ashkenazi Jews has now become more accessible and more affordable. A nonprofit public health initiative at Atlanta's Emory University School of Medicine developed an at-home saliva-based test so you can screen yourself for Cystic Fibrosis, Tay-Sachs, Gaucher and 16 other diseases. JScreen also provides genetic counseling. The test is intended for everyone planning to have children—people with Jewish ancestry as well as interfaith couples. *www.jscreen.org*

Vibrant Jewish Life in Poland

Before the Holocaust, Poland was home to the largest Jewish community in the world, and was one of the great centers of Jewish political, cultural, and religious life. Glimpse the rich and complex portrait of that vibrant Jewish community through thousands of digitized documents, manuscripts, photographs, artworks, films, and audio recordings online at the YIVO Digital Archive on Jewish Life in Poland. *polishjews.yivoarchives.org*

Would Your Family Have Made It?

Under today's strict immigration rules perhaps many of your ancestors would not have been permitted to enter and settle in the United States. Advocating on behalf of fair and just immigration reform, the Jewish social-justice organization Bend the Arc has created a website where you can enter your own family history to see how likely it is that your forebears would be admitted today. *EntryDenied.org*



Debbie Friedman Complete

Debbie Friedman (1951–2011) wrote and sang Jewish folk music that has been adopted by congregations, youth groups and summer camps of all denominations. "Debbie's unique contribution was the courage to blend Hebrew and English in the same song, using spiritually clear and poetic English to bring meaning to a Hebrew text or concept," says Rabbi Daniel Freelander of the Reform movement. Now her music is available in book form. *Sing Unto God: The Debbie Friedman Anthology* features the more than 200 songs she wrote and recorded, some previously unavailable, with lyrics, melody line and guitar chords, plus photographs, biographical information, and tributes. *urjbooksandmusic.com/product.php?productid=13090&cat=0&page=1&featured*

A Land Twice Promised

"Jumana looked at me across the picnic table and asked, how was it for you growing up in Jerusalem? I didn't know what to say. Those soldiers, so terrifying for her, were our boys, our symbol of security... Would it be all right to tell her?" A Palestinian living under Israeli occupation as a child and as a student, an Israeli child's experience of the 1967 war, a young Palestinian mother's memory of the same war, and an Israeli woman's experience of the 1948 war are performed by U.S.-based Israeli storyteller Noa Baumin, in English, in an attempt to help audiences realize that the most necessary ingredient for the resolution of a major conflict is mutual compassion. *noabaum.com*

Artists' Yenta

Ever thought you wanted someone to set your poetry to music? Have a performer enact the ideas in an essay? Choreographer, special events performance artist and collaborator Shandoah Godman has set up a weekly email matchmaking service"facilitating the love affair between disciplines." Here you can describe your own gifts or what kind of artists you're seeking to work with. *carteblancheperformance.com/artsyentawhitepage*

Unchained at Last

Dedicated to providing free legal and other support to help women leave arranged/forced marriages, Fraidy Reiss founded Unchained at Last. This nonprofit also works to prevent women from becoming trapped in arranged marriages in the first place by advocating for changes to laws regarding minimum marriage age and religious arbitration panels that oversee marriages and divorces. The work is directed at women of all ethnic and faith groups in the U.S. *unchainedatlast.org*

Honor Diaries

Spurred by the Arab Spring, women who were once silent are starting to speak out about gender inequality and a long history of oppression. A new film profiles nine courageous women's rights advocates with connections to Muslim-majority societies. Told exclusively in female voices, the film seeks to expose what prevents many feminists from addressing this international human rights disaster. Restriction of movement and education, forced marriage, and female genital mutilation are among the abuses explored. *honordiaries.com/end-violence-women*

Judy Chicago

Long gone is the era when women wouldn't reveal their ages. Now it is a mark of honor. Now we can celebrate the 75th birthday of the artist most famous for her iconic installation "The Dinner Party," on permanent display at Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum. That's also where a new exhibit, "Chicago in LA: Judy Chicago's Early Works 1963–1974," will be on display until September 28. Speaking at a lecture at New York City's Jewish Museum in May, delivered in honor of Mildred Weissman, Judy Chicago announced that because there is still no museum willing to devote adequate space for a retrospective on a female artist, her own work is on view now, in honor of her birthday, in multiple venues: "The Very Best of Judy Chicago," through August 1, at the MANA Contemporary Museum in Jersey City, NJ; "Re: Collection," through September 7, at Museum of Arts and Design, New York, NY; "Judy Chicago: Through the Archives," though September 30, at The Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Cambridge, MA; "Judy Chicago: A Butterfly for Oakland," through November 30, Oakland Museum of California, Oakland, CA; "Local Color: Judy Chicago in New Mexico 1984–2014," through October 12, New Mexico Museum of Art, Santa Fe, NM; and "A Survey: Judy Chicago," October 17–December 28, RedLine, Denver, CO. More at *www.judychicago.com/news/events.php*.

DINNER PARTY 1979, PHOTO DONALD WOODMAN, *JUDYCHICAGO.COM*

3000 Years of Poetic Subversion

At the annual KlezKanada Festival in Toronto this summer, the theme will be the "Yene Velt"—the dark side of the Ashkenazi mythic lore, including dybbuks, ghosts, hallucinations, various spirits and "undead elements." Adeena Karasick and Jake Marmer will host a poetry retreat, with four days of lectures, discussions, master classes on writing and performance, Aug 18–24, 2014. *klezkanada.org/poetry-retreat*

Tzitzit Designed for Women

Described in the Bible, Numbers 15:37-41, tzizit refers to a ritual fringed garment worn under the clothing and associated in rabbinic texts with performance of commandments and awareness of God and Torah. You can read about the experiences of women wearing tzizit, find textual sources and even a partner to study with, as well as order tzizit garments designed for women in a project created by Maya Rosen, Alexandra Polsky, Nahanni Rous and Avital Morris, who share the belief that mitzvot should be accessible to the entire Jewish people. *netzitzot.com*

And We Were Commanded

"When I wrapped my tefillin, I felt bold," wrote Judith Rosenbaum, incoming executive director of the Jewish Women's Archive reflecting on her first feminist decision as a bat mitzvah girl more than 25 years ago. Her blog post is one of several on a site exploring the idea of "commandedness" and obligation as it pertains to women wearing ritual garments. *vtzivanu.blogspot.com*

Torah Texts That Rock

Here I Am is a rock oratorio from composer/performer Lainie Fefferman in which she takes a personal look at Torah excerpts she finds puzzling. The passages she chose include: the laws in Leviticus where insulting your parents, being homosexual, and seeing ghosts are all equally punished by death; the story in which Lot offers his virgin daughters to the people of Sodom in exchange for the safety of his guests; and Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his own son to show his devotion. Each of nine movements for three singers, clarinet, violin, cello, electric guitar, piano, percussion, and drum set uses disparate genres and styles. *vimeo.com/88618400; lainiefefferman.com/hereiam*

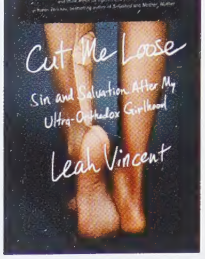
PHOTO RIGHT: LAINE FEFFERMAN

"Her Voice" in Jerusalem

Friday afternoon September 12, 2014 hundreds of women from dozens of choirs from Israel and around the world will walk together after the closing performance of the Jerusalem Sacred Music Festival in the Tower of David to the courtyard in front of the Jaffa Gate. In that public space the women will sing, a brand new musical-vocal work composed and conducted by Maya Dunietz with lyrics by Dorit Weisman and texts by female poets from Israel and abroad. This is one of several events of the Jerusalem Season of Culture. The public is invited to join in singing the final part, which you can learn, on video, at *JerusalemSeason.com*.

—compiled by Naomi Danis

For more, follow Lilith on Facebook and Twitter, and check out Lilith.org where you can sign up for Lilith's free email newsletter. Send ideas for this section to info@Lilith.org.



CUT LOOSE

by LEAH VINCENT

Leah Vincent, sent away from her Pittsburgh, crowded, ultra-Orthodox family after a tempestuous early adolescence, describes her solo life at age 17 on the margins in New York City—a crucial turning point in her transformative journey from Yeshivish daughter to Harvard-educated author.

THERE IS LITTLE ROOM FOR THE SINGLE GIRL in yeshivish life. For a woman, the rhythm of observance is tied to family. One is either a daughter or a wife. When my sisters had lived in New York, they'd spent Shabbos and holidays with friends from seminary who had family in New York. My sisters were extroverted girls who attracted new relationships like magnets. I had no friends from seminary, and I was not bold enough to make friends with strangers or approach distant cousins and ask if I could join them for a meal.

The worst part of the loneliness was how it compounded my boredom. Television, of course, was forbidden. I did not belong to a shul; as a girl without a husband or father on the other side of the *mechitza*, I was not expected to attend services. When I got home from work, I ate a slice of pizza or an apple for dinner, said my evening prayers slowly, showered for as long as I could stand, and then lay in bed in my nightgown, baking in the heat, worrying about my future as the moments dragged by.

... What's next, I wondered. If there is no world of dating and marriage waiting to pull me in, why am I here?

EACH DAY I WENT THROUGH THE MOTIONS of my job and then counted the long hours of the evening, alone in my apartment. I said the Shema prayer every night before sleep, but heaven seemed unresponsive.

I was always hungry. My minimum-wage check barely covered the rent, the phone bill, and the electric bill. On too many Thursdays I was left with just a slice of bread, a bottle of ketchup, and a few pieces of American cheese. I baked grilled cheese, chewing each piece dozens of times to make it last. I melted cheese and ketchup in a pot on the stove to make a gooey soup, which I choked down. I squeezed the ketchup into circles on my palms and lapped it up. I made a "salad" of bread and cheese and garnished it with ketchup.

In my father's parables, holy men were always scraping together pennies for weddings or Shabbos food. Poverty and spirituality seemed synonymous. As a child, wearing hand-me-down clothing and living with broken furniture just made me feel proud of our family's devotion to God.

But there was no spiritual superiority in mixing hand soap and water in an empty shampoo bottle and hoping the resulting mixture would leave my hair shiny and clean. There was no magic in stuffing ribbons of toilet paper into my socks at work to smuggle home. There was no God in the dry taste of stale bread for breakfast, lunch, and then dinner.

AFTER A FEW WEEKS, I picked up the phone and called my mother. "It's Leah."

"Hello. Hold on—One second, Boorie Tzvi! Everything okay?"

"Yes."

"It's very hectic now. Okay—"

"Mamme," I cut in before my mother could hang up.

"Things are tough. You know. Even with my job, it's hard. I don't always have money for stuff, for food and stuff." My instinct was to hide the choke in my voice, but I let it go. I wanted my mother to see the evidence, to understand how lost and overwhelmed I was feeling. "Could you help me, maybe?"

There was no God in the dry taste of stale bread for breakfast, lunch, and then dinner.

"Come on," my mother said. "Stop being melodramatic, Leah. It's not like you're starving. You're a grown-up now. You have to learn to stand on your own two feet."

"I know," I said, wiping my eyes on the back of my hand, ashamed of my outburst. "But it is—it is hard. I'm finding it hard."

"We'll see." My mother sighed. "I just don't know what happened. It feels like it's one thing after another with you. You were always such a well-behaved girl. How did you become who you are now? I tell you, sometimes I think you must be possessed by a dybbuk. I don't know how else to explain who you have turned into."

A chorus of shouts rose behind her.

"I've got to go now," she said. "The children need me."

A dybbuk? The diagnosis shocked me. Yeshivish Jews were not quick to speak of mystical things, let alone claim possession by a foreign evil spirit. That was the domain of the Hasidim. It was unsettling to hear my mother borrow such a foreign explanation.

If my mother thought I was possessed, then my prayers and stringencies had been for naught. There would be no thrilling conversations about someone's son or nephew or cousin. There would be no examination of the life of some boy, of the schools and camps he'd attended, friends and neighbors, family, good deeds, personality. A possessed girl. I was marked forever.

A few days later, a twenty-dollar check arrived in the mail. I had hoped for a more robust salvation, but I was grateful for the slice of pizza, jar of peanut butter, bag of apples, bottle of shampoo, and six cans of tuna my mother's money bought. ■

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